

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 27 : Number One : Spring 2006

Utopianism

Misuse of Power

Homosexuality and Priesthood

Boundaries Revisted

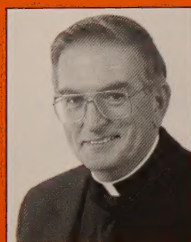
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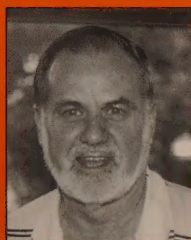
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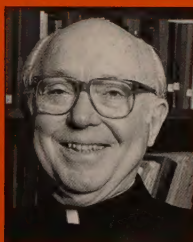
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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Editor's Page

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE PRIESTHOOD

The long-awaited and apparently long-debated document, "Concerning the Criteria of Vocational Discernment Regarding Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to Seminaries and Holy Orders" finally appeared in late November. Rumored for years as a document that would deny admission to anyone admitting to a homosexual orientation, this document needs to be read carefully and positively, as the former Master General of the Dominicans, Timothy Radcliffe, does. He wrote in *The Tablet* (November 26, 2005), noting what the document says and also what it does not say. As one who has written about my own reservations regarding the rumors surrounding the impending document (cf. "Editor's Page," *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter, 2003), I want to say something about the document that might be helpful to our readers and truthful to my own experience. I write from the stance of an incarnational spirituality as discussed in George Wilson's article on "Utopianism" in this issue. Reality does not give us easy "black and white" answers. I presume that the authors of the final document discovered over the years the complexity of the issues involved and, as a result, wrote a document that is carefully nuanced and open to interpretation on some of its significant statements.

Let it be said, immediately, that many priests who are both homosexual in their orientation and celibate were anxious before the document appeared and have not had their anxieties much assuaged by the document's actual message. Many still wonder if, in the eyes of the framers of this document and, therefore, the readers of the church, they are "damaged goods." Radcliffe himself writes that at a retreat for bishops and priests of eastern Canada, a priest wrote out a question he was unable to ask publicly: "Will this document ... mean that I am not welcome anymore?" Such a question brings tears to my eyes; it gives some indication of the suffering of many good priests who know of their homosexual orientation. With Radcliffe I

do not want to read the document as implying such a judgment on homosexual priests, but those of us who talk honestly with these men know that the hurt and pain are there. Many of these good priests and religious fear being honest about their orientation with a bishop or religious superior; they fear that their superior's reaction will only confirm their own reading of the document—that church leaders wish there were no homosexuals in the priesthood or religious life. I know that, for some, my words will only seem to put a good spin on a document that these men experience as an attack on their integrity. For the document seems to say, in its least positive reading, that homosexuals cannot come to "affective maturity" and cannot "relate properly with men and women." I will offer another viewpoint.

First of all, the document needs to be read as one in a long line of such documents promulgated by Roman congregations and the Pope on issues of readiness for seminary and for religious life. The document does not break new ground. It speaks of the need for a candidate to have affective maturity, and defines such maturity as allowing him "to relate properly with men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood for the ecclesial community that will be entrusted to him." What spiritual fatherhood means is hard to say, but the document seems to presume that a man with a homosexual orientation cannot develop a true sense of it.

Here, I think we need to look at the reality in our church. Men with a homosexual orientation are pastors and superiors, the spiritual head of the communities which they serve. *Ab esse ad posse* (from actual being to the possibility of such a being) was always a valid argument in the scholastic logic I was taught. I have known any number of men and women whose sexual attraction is to their own gender and who have been able to relate to men and women properly; they have been able to love without taking advantage of the other and to work effectively with a team of men and women.

Therefore it is possible for such men and women to achieve affective maturity.

How one reads the document hinges on how one interprets this paragraph:

This Dicastery ... deems it necessary to clearly affirm that the Church, even while deeply respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to Seminary or Holy Orders those who are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called gay culture.

The document does not say that the ordination of such men was or will be invalid. One can be fairly certain that in the deliberations that led to this document, the opinion offered some years ago by the papal press secretary, Dr. Joaquín Navarro Valls, that such ordinations were invalid was discussed and that it was decided not to include it in the document. The document applies only to admission to seminaries and Holy Orders from now on, and even then says nothing about the *validity* of the ordination of those men who "are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called gay culture." The document only addresses their admission to seminary and to Holy Orders.

There does not seem much to say about the first of these categories, those who are actively homosexual. Clearly, the document means those who engage in homosexual activity. But, of course, the same could be said of men who are heterosexual; if they are acting out sexually, they, too, should not be admitted to a seminary or to Holy Orders.

There is more to say about the meaning of supporting the "so-called gay culture." What does supporting gay culture mean? One interpretation would be that prospective seminarians who cannot feel at ease anywhere else but with other gay men should not be admitted. The *need* to frequent gay bars and to socialize only with those of the same orientation indicates emotional immaturity. It is possible, for example, that the writers of the document had in mind the kind of gay acting out reported about the Sankt Polten diocesan seminary in Austria, which led to the closing of the seminary and the resignation of the bishop. If that is the case, no one could have any doubt that supporting such a gay culture would be a counter-indication of affective maturity. What the phrase "supporting gay culture" cannot mean is that one may not minister to men who are involved in the gay culture or that one cannot speak openly about discrimination against

homosexuals. Both activities, however, could get a man tarred with the brush of supporting gay culture. Some careful discernment is needed on the part of those who accept candidates for seminaries and religious congregations, but a similar careful discernment is needed with clearly heterosexual candidates who are involved in a "heterosexual culture" that involves bar socialization and an excessive preoccupation with being with women.

The most difficult phrase in the pivotal paragraph is the one that speaks of "deep-seated homosexual tendencies." The document, in a later paragraph, seems to give an example of the opposite of such "deep-seated tendencies," namely, "homosexual tendencies that might only be a manifestation of a transitory problem, as, for example, delayed adolescence," problems which "must be clearly overcome at least three years before diaconal Ordination." One reading of the phrase "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" is to take it as meaning a clear homosexual orientation, that is, a sexual attraction to members of one's own gender. This reading would be consistent with the counter-example of delayed adolescence.

This seems to have been the interpretation of Msgr. Tony Anatrella, a French priest-psychoanalyst, who wrote a two-page article in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*. According to Robert Mickens ("Ambiguous Tendencies," *The Tablet*, December 3, 2005), Anatrella took the stance that in males a homosexual orientation demonstrates a lack of "sufficient affective and sexual maturity in coherence with one's masculine sexual identity." I presume that Anatrella is speaking here as a psychologist or psychoanalyst and, therefore, on the basis of research and clinical practice. It must be said, however, that other social scientists would strongly disagree with his conclusions.

When I was studying clinical psychology some thirty years ago, homosexuality was considered a psychological illness. Then studies began to appear that questioned this diagnosis on the basis of psychological testing and clinical practice. In the course of time, homosexuality was deleted as a psychiatric diagnosis. In other words, most social scientists do not believe homosexuality is a psychiatric disorder. Those whose orientation is homosexual may have a psychiatric disorder, just as those who are heterosexual may have a psychiatric disorder. Given the cultural bias against homosexuality, men and women with this orientation have a tough row to hoe in coming to affective maturity. They may need psychological counseling to develop

his maturity, but their problems arise from the difficulty presented by most cultures in coming to self-acceptance, not because homosexuality is in itself a psychiatric disorder. It must also be said that some people of a homosexual orientation never come to such maturity; but the same can be said for heterosexuals.

I do not agree with Msgr. Anatrella's conclusions. In my life I have met homosexual men and women who have exhibited an ability to love others for their own sake and to work effectively, both signs of affective maturity. Hence, I agree with those who interpret the phrase "those who have deep-seated tendencies" as referring not to their sexual orientation per se, but to the centrality of the orientation to their lives.

There are people whose central focus seems to be their sexuality. Radcliffe, in the article mentioned earlier, understands the words in this way. "Perhaps it is best understood as meaning that someone whose sexual orientation is so central to his self-perception as to be obsessive, dominating his imagination." He notes that such a person would not be a good candidate for priesthood or religious life, but that the same can be said of someone obsessed with his heterosexual orientation. I have met men and women whose life seemed to be focused on sexuality, who seemed obsessed with it. They knew every titillating detail of sex scandals in the tabloids, every sexually explicit movie or play, and seemed on the lookout for every sexual innuendo in conversations. They tended to rate others on their sexual attractiveness and always gravitated toward the best looking ones. Some of them were homosexual in orientation, some heterosexual. I do not consider such people affectively mature nor good candidates for Christian ministry. I interpret the words of the paragraph about "deep-seated tendencies" to refer to such people, not to men and women comfortable with their sexuality, and able to love unselfishly and to work effectively alone and with others. Freud defined maturity as the ability to love and to work. The church needs religious and priests who have the maturity to love unselfishly and to work effectively. In my experience, such ministers have come in both heterosexual and homosexual packages.

It must be admitted that the document leaves itself open to other interpretations. This is not unusual with church documents dealing with complex issues. If the document's framers had been able to agree totally, it would have been more unambiguous. But that is the genius of committees, especially committees that deal

with issues that have far-reaching consequences in a worldwide, two-thousand year-old church. It does no good to bemoan the ambiguity.

It is clear that the church and the world are going through a great upheaval as we face the consequences of globalization and the end of what has been termed the "age of modernity." For a long time the Roman Catholic Church fought a rear-guard battle to stem the tide of modernity, but the Second Vatican Council finally moved the Church into the mainstream of the world. Roman Catholics have experienced not only the upheavals in the world over the past forty years, but also the Church's own internal upheavals as we have tried to implement Vatican II's reforms. One of the significant world upheavals has been in the area of sexuality. The cultural changes in sexual mores that have swept the world have also affected us. I agree with Tom Fox who wrote in the last issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* ("Evangelization from the Inside Out: Bringing Faith to the Young"):

I am convinced it will take decades for Catholics to emerge from the sexual darkness in which we live. This darkness is especially pernicious because it can cover the liberating message of the gospels: that we are loved and called to love, that the Christian path is a compassionate one, and that mercy and forgiveness rest at the center of God's love for us. During this period of reconstruction our collective challenge is to stay open to all sincere Catholic voices on sexuality, especially those with whom we disagree.

We must not allow our fears of aberrations in sexual conduct to stifle these sincere Catholic voices. Nor must we allow the sensational reports of sexual abuses by priests and religious to blind ourselves to the reality of the facts on the ground: there are men and women whose sexual attraction is to their own gender; these people have not chosen this orientation; many of them have come to affective maturity; many have felt the call to priesthood and religious life and have been effective ministers; and many are now experiencing a call to priesthood and religious life and will become effective ministers. Indeed, the present shortage of both priests and religious would be even more severe if such people were eliminated from the ranks.

Finally, I want to comment on the document's laudatory exhortation to complete honesty in candidates for priesthood and religious life. I do not know how men and women can come to the kind of affective

maturity demanded of their vocations without such honesty. However, the document itself leaves the door open that such honesty from homosexual men willing and able to live comfortably with life-long celibacy, will lead to their exclusion or dismissal from the seminary or religious congregations. Even if they open themselves in trust to their spiritual directors, they take the chance, not that their confidences will be violated, but that their spiritual directors will strongly advise them not to apply for seminary or a religious congregation or to leave the seminary or congregation if already accepted. I pray that things will not move in this direction. The only way to affective maturity and to spiritual maturity is to be willing to be transparent with God in prayer and to speak of what happens in this kind of prayer with one's spiritual director. The results of the closeting of sexuality from discussions with spiritual directors cannot be good. Let us hope that we do not enter a new period of "don't ask, don't tell."

The document discussed in these pages was issued as one of a series of documents that indicate how the cultural changes in matters sexual have impinged on the Church. Openness about sexuality is a new phenomenon in our world. This openness has led to questions about what is moral and what immoral that would never have been asked in former times. We need to read documents such as the one under discussion with this cultural climate change in mind. These cultural changes in sexual mores have forced religious congregations to face new issues. For example, in the 1960s some posited the notion of a "Third Way" for members of religious congregations. The "Third Way" held that sexual activity between committed religious was per-

mitted as long as it was an expression of love. This idea led to explicit congregational denials that such a "Third Way" was compatible with religious life, something religious congregations had never before had to address. So too, the unwillingness of homosexuals to be silent about who they are has raised new issues that did not exist when the presumption was that everyone was heterosexual. Many seminarians, priests and religious who are homosexual in orientation no longer feel comfortable or even honest hiding the fact of their orientation, at least among people they trust. It is a measure of the reality of this openness that such documents as the one under discussion have appeared at all. They are signs of the cultural changes we are undergoing. We need to read this document as one of the "way stations" we in the church are going through on our way to a fuller and healthier view of sexuality.

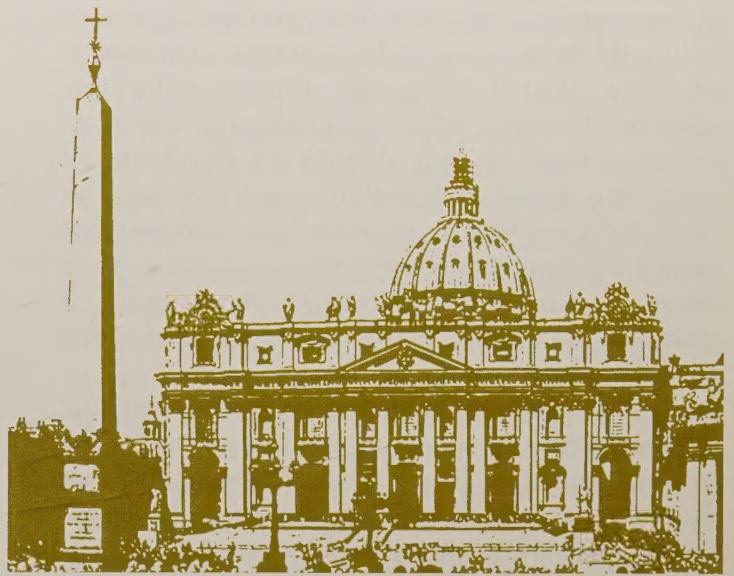
As we move forward, we need to keep our eyes on God and on the facts before us. God is calling people of homosexual and heterosexual orientations to priestly and religious life. Those who are helping to form the persons God is calling need to help them come to affective maturity. This can only be done if there is an atmosphere of trust and openness in seminaries and religious congregations. Let us pray that the document does not lead to the loss of such an atmosphere where it now exists.

Bill Barry, S.J.

William A. Barry, S.J.
Editor-in-Chief

A Psychologist Responds to the Vatican Instruction on Homosexuality

Lief Noll, Ph.D.



As a clinical psychologist who performs psychological evaluations of candidates for several religious communities, I am interested in exploring how the instruction from the Vatican, *Regarding Persons With Homosexual Tendencies*, might affect the work of mental health professionals who advise religious and diocesan vocation directors in such matters. It does not seem to me that this latest instruction is a specific response to the clergy sexual abuse scandal, but the commentary I have read and the reactions I have heard from clients and colleagues indicate that the two are linked in the eyes of many. Those priests and religious with whom I have spoken who sense the release of the instruction as a response to clergy sexual abuse of minors wonder whether the “fault” for the scandal is being laid squarely in the laps of homosexual priests; the solution seemingly offered, if that is the case, is simply to bar homosexuals from seminaries. However, it is my understanding that the document mostly reiterates a teaching from the early 1960s and is a part of an ongoing set of instructions on sexuality and priesthood that stretches over the past four or five decades.

“There is no direct link between the sexual abuse issues among Roman Catholic clergy and homosexuality.”

Obviously, there have been many homosexual clergy and religious who have expressed dismay, publicly and privately, over what they regard as a condemnation of homosexual clergy, even those who live their vows well, and who are happy to be in ministry. Those of us who have treated clergy and religious pedophiles, ephebophiles (those who act out sexually with post-pubescent teens, the bulk of clergy sex offenders), and clergy who engage in unhealthy sexual behavior with adult males and females, are clear in our certainty that there is no direct link between the sexual abuse issues among Roman Catholic clergy and homosexuality. If there is a “gay culture” in the Church, it is not focused on children and young people.

It is the state of current scientific understanding that homosexuality is not, in most cases, something a person “chooses.” I have a rough understanding that the church accepts this to some degree, and cautions against unjust discrimination or judgment of persons simply because they are homosexually inclined. The Congregation for the Defense of the Faith’s 1986 *Letter to Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* states (paragraph 3): “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.” Clinicians have not regarded homosexuality per se as an objective disorder for two generations. Professional associations in all the mental health professions have stated in clear terms that homosexuality is not a psychological disorder, and that there may in fact be biological or genetic factors underlying same-sex orientation. These views are not without critics. The debate continues, both in the Church and in the broader culture, but the shift toward acceptance of homosexuality as a valid lifestyle in Western societies seems a tide not to be stemmed. The purpose of this article is not to settle that particular issue, but

to respond to some concerns about the translation of a theological teaching into psychological practice, where psychology plays a prominent role in the evaluation, selection, and formation of candidates for Holy Orders.

ASSESSING AFFECTIVE MATURITY

As a clinician, particularly in the assessment of the psychosexual maturity of candidates for religious life and priesthood, my focus is less on the explicitly moral issues of sin and evil, and more on issues of a candidate’s self awareness of his homo- or hetero-sexuality, the degree to which he is mature and self-disciplined in his thinking and conduct regarding his sexuality, his behavioral history with regard to sexual matters, and the degree to which his spirituality is integrated into his self structure such that a life of celibacy can be supported and nourished by healthy intimacy with God, himself, and others.

The instruction first addresses the issue of *affective maturity*. Affective maturity in the context of the present instruction enables the priest “to relate correctly to both men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood towards the Church community that will be entrusted to him.” Pope John Paul II, in his 1992 encyclical *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, (paragraph 44), elaborates upon the notion of affective maturity in priests. He speaks of the nuptial meaning of the human body, the centrality of love in human life, self discipline and vigilance with regard to sexual matters, and “heartfelt obedience to the ‘truth’ of one’s own being, the ‘meaning’ of one’s own existence, that is, to the ‘sincere gift of self’ as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of the self.” Such maturity involves some very deep and thorough psychological and spiritual work. Writers in the field of adult development suggest that humans do not reach psychological maturity until somewhere in midlife. For psychologists who evaluate candidates for priesthood, especially those candidates in their twenties and thirties, part of the task is to assess whether a person is on track to attain affective maturity. Most would be surprised to find a twenty-four-year-old candidate who has attained the level of maturity indicated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

Affective maturity, the capacity to “relate correctly” to those whom one is serving in a pastoral capacity, requires several qualities, all of which I feel comfortable placing under the heading of “affective maturity.” A healthy priest needs a solid sense of self, which

includes self-awareness and self-acceptance. He also needs to have a good degree of empathy and a capacity to be in relationship, to give and receive the sort of emotional intimacy that is so important to human emotional well-being. Along with this must come a solid awareness of healthy boundaries, his own and those of others, and a clear sense of boundaries in professional relationships. To the category of affective maturity I would add self-discipline and the capacity to identify one's own needs and to care for oneself physically, relationally, emotionally, and spiritually. The affectively mature person is an *integrated* person. The many and varied aspects of self, and self in relationship, are woven into a coherent whole. Affective maturity depends upon our ability to integrate the many aspects of ourselves—the spiritual, psychological, and relational—into a consistent self that is capable of insight, interdependence, and growth. This is a rough and simple construction of the healthy self to which others might add moral or other virtues, additional or different skills or qualities, and different aims, but *integration* is one key quality psychologists and vocations directors look for in candidates for religious life or priesthood.

In my years as a staff clinician in a residential treatment program for Roman Catholic clergy and religious, I treated men of various orientations (homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual) who acted out sexually in ways that would be considered disordered by any standard, religious or secular. The crux of the problem for many of these men, even those who acted out sexually with adolescent boys, was not their orientation *per se*, but rather the lack of integration of their sexuality into a balanced and healthy sense of self. Such individuals have not arrived at a full and integrated awareness and acceptance of the “truth of [their] own being.” I have seen in treatment a great many heterosexual men whose sexuality is not integrated, resulting in sexual exploitation of female parishioners, addiction to pornography, and other disordered tendencies. Such men are clearly impaired in their capacity to relate correctly to both men and women. The problem is not the orientation, but the lack of affective maturity, the lack of integration. Sexual tendencies, emotional needs, questions about virility, repressed anger and resentment, and aching loneliness all get compartmentalized, split off, and not dealt with as aspects of the self. Compartmentalization leads to an over-identification with the “role” of priest, and a disconnection from the truth, the meaning, the sincere gift, of the whole self.

“The problem is not the orientation, but the lack of affective maturity, the lack of integration.”

THREE ASPECTS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

My reading of the instruction under discussion is that it raises concerns about three aspects of homosexuality: those who practice homosexuality, those who have present deep-seated homosexual tendencies (and here, the document draws a distinction between deep-seated and transient tendencies), and those who would endorse “gay culture.” It is obvious that a person who is or who has recently been sexually active, homosexually or heterosexually, is not a good candidate for celibate life. In evaluating candidates it is important to look for evidence that the person has been orienting himself toward celibate life by building into his life appropriate social resources (healthy intimate relationships with a variety of people) and spiritual resources (a vital and growing prayer life). The concern about those who endorse “gay culture” is also quite sensible in light of the Church’s teaching regarding the objective disorder of a homosexual orientation. Encouraging or condoning what the Church teaches as intrinsically evil behavior is not something priests ought to be doing.

Of greater concern in light of the psychological assessment of the affective maturity, or integration, of candidates for Holy Orders is the distinction between “deep-seated” and “transitory” homosexual tendencies. These terms may make better sense to a theologian than they do to a psychologist, but I would like to explore them from a psychological standpoint. Where sexuality is regarded as an essential aspect of the human person, “tendencies” can be understood as “orientation.” Perhaps because homosexuality is not regarded as part of the natural order, the word tendencies is used. While the Church’s teaching is that such a person is disordered, conventional wisdom in the mental health field accepts an orientation (homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual) as part of the person and

“The failure of integration set the stage for this unintegrated, un-self-aware clergyman to engage in sexual exploitation or to lead a double-life of unhealthy sexual behavior.”

leads our evaluation process to ask deeper questions about the integration of sexual orientation into a coherent, free and responsible self. Is the person integrated enough to live priesthood in a holy and healthy manner? Whether a person has a transitory or deep-seated tendency or orientation toward homosexuality, then, is of great significance. However, the question of whether a person with transitory or deep seated homosexual tendencies is capable of affective maturity is a point over which some mental health professionals might wish to dialogue with the Vatican instruction.

Transitory homosexual tendencies are defined in the instruction as follows: “Different, however, would be the case in which one were dealing with homosexual tendencies that were only the expression of a transitory problem—for example, that of an adolescence not yet superseded. Nevertheless, such tendencies must be clearly overcome at least three years before ordination to the diaconate.” In thinking about past candidates I have evaluated and reflecting upon the stories of psychosexual development I have heard from clergy and religious over the years, the psychosexual developmental implications of “transitory homosexual tendencies” raise some clinical red flags. Adolescent experimentation with same-sex relationships is not a terribly unusual occurrence, and may not even necessarily reflect a transitory homosexual tendency. However, it is also not unusual for same-sex exploration during adolescence to be a sign of deeper questions about sexual orientation. For instance, if a candidate reports some homosexual experimentation, or a period of looking at gay pornography, or struggles with some question about his sexual orientation, it will be important to assess carefully how well a person has integrated these experiences of himself and whether there seems to be sufficient stability and integrity in the self to allow for healthy celibacy and priesthood. If the work on integration has not been done, we might suspect that his

sexuality is unintegrated and still forming. It has been my experience that sometimes a period of same-sex exploration or experimentation, especially in a man who holds his Catholicism deeply, and who has thoughts of priesthood, is followed by a shameful foreclosure on the sexual question, or a backing away from sexuality and into religion as a way to evade the issue. Experience tells us that such evasion rarely works out well in the long run. The shame of acknowledging homosexual tendencies, or orientation, is considerable, and it is not unheard of for a man to seek solace from his sexuality by becoming a celibate. What the instruction describes as transitory homosexual tendencies, then, might reflect a profound lack of integration, of affective maturity.

IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION

Clinical experience bears this out. I cannot think of many patients I have treated for sexual addictions or for acting out sexually with adult men, adult women, or adolescent boys, who did not have a profound lack of integration of their sexuality with the rest of their sense of themselves. In many of these cases, sexuality was flirted with in adolescence in a furtive, shameful way; more likely, however, sexuality was repressed, avoided, or otherwise unintegrated by early adulthood and ordination. Then, in a priestly or religious role, relationships became available which offered power, pseudo-intimacy, and trust. The failure of integration set the stage for this unintegrated, un-self-aware clergyman to engage in sexual exploitation or to lead a double-life of unhealthy sexual behavior.

As for the issue of deep-seated homosexual tendencies, I think it would be safe to assume that the instruction is referring to men who have a clear sense that their orientation is “constitutionally” homosexual. It is easy to conclude from the instruction that homosexual persons, no matter how well integrated, are incapable of affective maturity and therefore incapable of relating “correctly” to men and women, and developing a true sense of spiritual fatherhood to those entrusted to them. This does not square with clinical experience. It would seem that a man with a same-sex orientation who does not act on his attractions, thus avoiding behavior that is of intrinsic moral evil, might still be considered an appropriate candidate for priesthood. Let us suppose a candidate comes for evaluation who claims to have known he is homosexual since

childhood, who may have had some period of sexual exploration, perhaps even a long-term relationship in early adulthood. He has done the work of accepting as part of his nature that he is homosexual and has grappled with the implications of this with regard to his identity as a Roman Catholic; still he feels a strong call to priesthood. In my evaluation I find that he has spoken with his spiritual director about his orientation, and has developed a healthy prayer life and a set of relationships that help hold him accountable and to maintain his integrity. He enjoys warm and close relationships with his family, and with friends of both genders. He feels pain over the Church's teaching regarding his sexuality, but his desire to serve in a consecrated role leads him to embrace celibacy as a way of being in deeper relationship with the Church and with God's people. I must admit that such a person demonstrates a capacity for affective maturity, for the integration of every aspect of himself into a coherent self. Given all this, must I advise the man's vocation director to deny him admission to seminary? It seems that the instruction draws the bar not so much at affective maturity, but simply at orientation. To exclude a healthy, well-integrated candidate for seminary on this basis seems unjust discrimination to faithful Catholic men who earnestly desire to serve as priests. The candidate described above (and I have seen such men as candidates, and I know such men as priests) has come to terms in a healthy, well integrated way with his "deep-seated" homosexual tendencies, just as a psychologically healthy heterosexual man might come to terms with his deep-seated heterosexuality. Such a man has come home to who he is, he knows and accepts himself as he has been created. And he is willing and able to live with maturity a life of love and service. The language of the instruction seems to indicate that I must endorse the heterosexual candidate while excluding the other man.

A homosexual orientation does pose an extra set of challenges for a seminarian. Life in an all-male environment, with all-male colleagues, will offer temptations that are not common to their heterosexual counterparts. However, an atmosphere of openness, safety and dialogue, and an acknowledgement that some people have a homosexual orientation would help homosexual seminarians to live with integrity. Heterosexual seminarians are not without their own temptations to furtive relationships or, probably more commonly, use of internet pornography. Failure to address such issues

"Affective maturity is just as much of a challenge for heterosexuals."

as part of the integration of sexuality leads to secrecy, duplicity, and eventually, to scandal.

In the evaluation of candidates it is my role to assess the human formation potential of the candidate, as well as the psychological capacity for spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. What I am looking for in a candidate for the priesthood or religious life is a man who is integrated and self-accepting; aware of his needs, strengths, and weaknesses; capable of mutuality in relationships; disciplined in his prayer life and habits; flexible, humble, and humorous; and aware enough of his sexual and relationship needs to make an informed commitment to celibacy and chastity. A healthy and well integrated man, whatever his orientation, is, in my experience, capable of functioning as a holy and healthy priest. Sexuality must be explored in a candidate deeply and thoughtfully. It should be added here that experiences and self-awareness around sexual issues in those who claim a heterosexual orientation are just as important to assess. It is easy to err on the side of not probing as carefully for integration of sexuality in men who report what sounds like "normal" heterosexual attractions and behavior. Affective maturity is just as much of a challenge for heterosexuals.

A WORD OF LIFE

In conclusion, the Vatican instruction regarding homosexuality in candidates for priesthood underscores for me that it is ever more important to assess carefully the candidate's psychosexual history and to listen for themes that reflect integration and affective maturity. The essential psychological health of a candidate, his sexual integration, his level of maturity, his self-awareness, his self-discipline, and his depth of spirituality, ought to remain our primary areas of focus. A man must be healthy enough to undergo human formation at some depth, and to be courageous in his

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introspection. From a psychological perspective I believe it is more likely for a man with so called "deep-seated homosexual tendencies," to reach affective maturity than a man with "transitory" tendencies. The notion of transitory homosexual tendencies simply raises too many red flags from a psychosocial developmental perspective. I can envision far more scenarios in which "transitory" translates directly into "unintegrated." My greatest concern is that this document will have a chilling effect on a candidate's ability to be open about sexual issues. While the instruction cautions against candidates being dishonest about sexuality, it is my experience that even in the safest of settings, men will tend to be circumspect rather than forthright

about sexual matters. The topic is awkward enough without the fear that this instruction has injected into the process. I hope that this document does not have the effect of driving the discussion of sexuality underground. Thus far clergy sexuality seems to have been dealt with either as a secret or as a scandal. An alternative would be for honest and open discussion of sexuality in seminaries, an aspect of human formation that many seminaries have been taking quite seriously. Likewise, in our modern culture frank discussions about sexuality, homosexuality, and the role of the celibate witness in American culture are desperately needed. The culture is yammering, often incoherently, about sex, and the Church has some important things to say about human life and human sexuality. It needs well integrated priests and pastoral ministers, heterosexual or homosexual, to speak this word for the life of the world.



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A NATIONWIDE SURVEY ON ALCOHOL ABUSE

About 17.6 million people in the U.S. (one in every twelve adults) abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. Since abuse of alcohol is very often accompanied by other physical and psychological health issues, we have a major health problem. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) is beginning to produce findings from a mammoth nationwide longitudinal survey begun in 2001. One of the preliminary findings, one that has implications for families and educational institutions, is that problem drinking is most prevalent in young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Problem drinking begins much earlier than expected. Last year the Department of Health and Human Services launched an advertising campaign to urge parents to begin talking about alcohol with their children even when the children are eleven years old. The survey also finds that alcohol abuse is associated with drug abuse and with mental disorders. For more on the survey go to www.niaaa.gov. (Reported in *Monitor on Psychology*, 37, n. 1, January, 2006, pp. 30-32.)

What is the Real World?

William A. Barry, S.J.



Religious people who try to live in accordance with their religious beliefs will sometimes encounter comments like this: “Get with the real world. You can’t live with your head in the clouds. In the real world you have to leave your religion for Sundays.” We can feel threatened by such comments, wondering if the others are right. After all we, too, like our irreligious neighbors, live in what seems a rather dark and dismal time. I want to ponder with you the question: What is the “real world?” Let’s start with two poems written by Englishmen in the late 19th century, which give diametrically opposite answers to this question. The first is Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” written in 1867.

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, for the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanced land,
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! For the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Many of us might find this 150-year-old poem speaking to us in this new century where ignorant armies clash by night and by day, and where, we fear, the sea of faith retreats down the drear edges of our shores. Does Arnold describe the real world?

Or is the real world the one described by Gerard Manley Hopkins in "God's Grandeur" written ten years later than "Dover Beach" in 1877?

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell/
 the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
 And, for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastwards, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah!
 bright Wings.

Many of us are cheered by such a vision, but is it a pipe dream given the reality that goes on all around us? Which poem speaks of the real world?

Both of these poets lived at the same time in Victorian England, when Great Britain bestrode the world as a colossus and seemed to be at the height of its imperial grandeur. But the imperial grandeur did not preclude wars and rumors of wars, severe poverty, early death by disease, and the pollution caused by the Industrial Revolution. Clearly both poets felt the dark side of things in their age. Both of them, it seems, were prone to dark moods. Hopkins often felt despair. Among other things, he never saw a single poem of his published. Yet, "God's Grandeur" attests that he was able to overcome his tendency to depression and despair. But the question remains: which poet is describing the real world? I want to discuss this issue because we live in dark times, both in the world and in our church, in this sixth year of the new century and millennium when the United States bestrides the world as a colossus and seems at the height of its grandeur and power.

According to Arnold the real world is a world where faith no longer helps; the poem drips with sadness at the loss of faith. There is nothing to rely on. The only hope is to cling to those we love. In our new century the vitality and hope that buoyed many people after the Second World War seems to have been sucked out of us. We can, perhaps, read Arnold's "Dover Beach" and resonate with it. Natural disasters, global warming, wars and terrorism have knocked any optimism out of us. For citizens of the U.S. the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, blew away any illusions that our homeland was immune from terrorist attacks. In addition, the aftermath of that attack and the wars in Afghanistan and then in Iraq have left us feeling even more vulnerable and afraid. It's as though we have been hit in the stomach with a powerful body punch; the air has just gone out of us. We live in a world where fear is rampant.

In addition, the church in many places in the world has been dealt a vicious body blow by the accusations (and reality) of sexual abuse by many priests and religious; the precipitous decline in the number of priests and religious, at least in the developed world; and

large, empty churches in many of our cities. In many parts of the church wide fissures between and among Catholics have sapped energy and caused waves of sadness, if not of depression. We can, indeed, feel the pinch of Arnold's poem. Perhaps Arnold and others who have lost hope are living in the real world while those of us who, like Hopkins, maintain hope live in a world of empty dreams.

Remember that Hopkins lived in the same country and at the same time as Arnold. Remember, too, that Hopkins could write such lines as these in addition to the lines of "God's Grandeur":

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! What sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay....
I am gall, I am heartburn.

Clearly, he was not a man of sunny disposition, by nature or nurture. Yet, Hopkins could write with passion that, in spite of all the pain and suffering, in spite of the stupidity and the evil human beings are capable of, in spite of his own dark moods,

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastwards, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright Wings.

What made it possible for him to write these words?! Every year of his Jesuit life Hopkins made the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, twice in their full thirty-day form, every other time for eight days at a crack. During these days of prayer he asked to see the world through God's eyes in the last great contemplation of the *Exercises*, the Contemplation to Attain Love. This contemplation is the culmination of the retreat. The one who makes it asks for "interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things." During this contemplation one asks to recall one's creation and salvation and all the particular gifts one has received in life.

"I will ponder," writes Ignatius, "with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much God has given me of what God possesses,

"The question each of us faces is the one he and all human beings face: Is there reason for hope? Do we see glimmers of light in our darkness?"

and consequently how God desires to give me God's own self insofar as God can do so." In addition, I ask to experience how God dwells in everything; how God labors and works for me in everything on the face of the earth, and how all good things and gifts descend from above. In other words, the one making the retreat wants to experience this world as "charged with the grandeur of God." Apparently Hopkins received what he asked for.

The question each of us faces is the one he and all human beings face: Is there reason for hope? Do we see glimmers of light in our darkness? Let me say some things about the "real world" for those who believe in the God of Jewish and Christian scriptures.

The real world, according to our scriptures, is God's creation, created out of nothing except God's desire for its existence. God wants this world to exist. Moreover, in the very first chapter of scripture, in the Book of Genesis, God is depicted as creating this world with a lavishness, generosity and bounty that seems to have no bounds except the bounds of the world itself. To the animals, birds and fish, and to human beings as well, God asks for the same generosity and bounty. We hear God say, "increase and multiply." Once I heard the Creation Oratorio of Haydn sung in German. The words in German for "Increase and multiply" are *Mehret euch*. *Mehret* comes from the adverb *mehr* meaning "more." *Euch* means "yourselves." More yourselves, God shouted out through the voice of an angel in the oratorio. Of course, it means procreation, but what also comes through to me is: "Make more of yourselves, be your best selves, be like me in creativity, generosity, love."

In addition, one can read the second story of creation (Genesis chapters two and three) as a story of God creating the world as a garden where human beings cooperate in friendship with God and one another and the whole of creation. In this story the human beings are naked and are not ashamed, a symbol of their transparency before

"It really is a question of paying attention to those experiences that reveal God's grandeur."

God and one another. In this story, sin brings in fear and shame, throws a monkey wrench into God's dream. But God does not give up on the dream. God calls Abraham and Sarah to become God's friends and cooperators, a beginning of the reversal of the effects of sin in the world. In other words, God creates us in God's own image in order to live in friendship with God, with all other human beings, and with the whole of creation, and even human sin has not derailed God's dream.

In this continuing story of God and the world God finally pitches his tent in the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who calls people into friendship with him and with one another. "I have called you friends." "A new command I give you, love one another." In other words, be my friends and be friends with one another. We believe that Jesus, the Jew of Galilee, is so one with God that he is God. And he is risen from the dead, bodily risen. The body is different than ours, but it is a body. Bodies have physical ties with the whole universe. So the particles that make up Jesus' body swirl through this universe. Heaven is not "out there." In some real way it's right here.

In addition, we believe that the Holy Spirit of God dwells in human hearts. God's Spirit animates our desires, our hopes, our dreams, and moves us to want what God wants. And this Spirit dwells in real people like us. And we are part of the real world. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God; it will flame out like shining from shook foil." This, then, we believe, is the real world. If it's not, then our faith is, indeed, a pipe dream.

If, then what we Christians believe is true the real world is the world described in Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur," not the one of Arnold's "Dover Beach." And it's this world, not another world out there beyond this one; this one, with all its pain, difficulty, evil and misery, as Hopkins wrote, is "charged with the grandeur of God." If this is true, we must experience this real world, at least some times. Do we? That's the big question. Is

it possible to believe in this real world? Or is Arnold right, that faith in such a world is no longer possible? For the remainder of this article, I want to speak to the question of our experience of the world.

I believe in the real world I described; this real world is the one compatible with faith in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. As a result, I have to believe that this real world can be experienced. We do have experiences of this world as "charged with the grandeur of God." But we can easily pass them by as unimportant and miss their meaning. We need to be alert to experiences of the "good news," ready to pay attention to them, to pay at least as much attention to these experiences as we do to "bad news." It really is a question of paying attention to those experiences that reveal God's grandeur. It is the privilege and responsibility of pastoral ministers, especially spiritual directors, to help people to pay attention to such experiences.

Let me point to some such experiences that will, I hope, get you reflecting on your own experiences more positively. The first comes from a friend, Patrick Malone, S.J. who went to Haiti recently with a group delivering medicine to a health clinic. As the group was being driven to the clinic, they met a haggard woman asking for help. This incident reminded one of them, Marlene, of how awful she felt when she could not offer help or hope to a Haitian family on another trip. "One is so limited in the face of hardship and unfairness," she said, and continued, "The rural people here have a common saying in their language, Creole: *Bonjya konai*, 'the good God knows.' Pat Malone writes:

"When life is miserable, God knows, when one suffers, God knows. The whispered quote caused a slight movement of the other passengers' heads in Marlene's direction. Without realizing the impact the phrase had on them, Marlene had stirred something.... Delivered in an inconsequential, matter-of-fact tone, it had the same impact as the chimes used in Mass when the priest raises the newly consecrated host. Awaken. Do not speak; just stop whatever drifting or self-absorption or pettiness is consuming you, so you do not miss this symbol. Here, before your eyes, you are invited to experience something that remains both common and rare. Do not slumber past the significance. Do not dismiss it as ordinary, or easily explainable."

Here is a sign of hope in a very unlikely place indeed.

And I have found signs of hope in stories I've read.

I want to recount two such stories that lifted my spirits when I read them. In his column in *The Boston Globe* for Tuesday, March 4, 2003 Brian McGrory described a remarkable instance of forgiveness. David, a young man on a motorcycle, was hit by a drunk driver and left a paraplegic needing day and night care by his mother. Recently the driver, given the name Daniel in the article, had been arrested again for drunk driving. David's brother went to trial to see that justice was done. Afterward he met Daniel and Daniel's mother in the parking lot and stopped to tell them what had happened to his brother since the accident. Driving drunk again had been like a slap in the face to their family, he said, and then he suggested that Daniel come to visit his brother to see what he had done. Daniel and his mother decided to pay a visit. When Daniel saw his victim, he doubled over and began to sob uncontrollably. David's mother had wanted this moment for seven years, since the accident. But then, writes McGrory, "she couldn't help herself. She walked around the bed, walked up to the man who destroyed her son, and she hugged him." She said, "Daniel, it took a lot of guts to come here. It shows you have character. There's David. He has no future. But you do. You owe it to David and to your mother and to me and to yourself to fly right." Only God's grace could have produced such an act of forgiveness. The mother even begged McGrory not to use the young man's real name, believing that he could straighten out.

Matt Malone, S.J., no relative of Pat cited above, writes of a similar act of forgiveness in *America* just a few days later (March 7, 2003). Matt's father, a firefighter, was awakened one night by an emergency call, a car wreck. The driver was O.K., but the passenger was badly hurt, and Mr. Malone realized that it was his own son, Joseph, who died soon after. The driver was drunk. At the driver's trial Mr. Malone was asked to make a victim's statement just before sentencing. Usually such statements ask for the maximum sentence. Here is what Mr. Malone said:

My son Joseph was a bright, good-natured young man with enormous potential. The emo-

tional impact of this event on my family has been devastating. Today the driver of the vehicle stands before you awaiting sentencing. He has admitted to his guilt. He was Joseph's friend and co-worker; yet, through the thoughtlessness of his actions Joseph is dead. Kenny didn't approach that terrible night with the thought of harming anyone, least of all his friend, but the result is that one young man is dead, our family has suffered, and, not least of all, he himself has suffered. Kenny has to bear the knowledge of what he did for the rest of his life. That burden is far greater than any punishment this court could dispense. For this reason, I respectfully request that this court hear the appeal of the victim's parent and family and impose the minimum possible sentence.

Matt Malone believes that his father was able to forgive Kenny because he was able, like Jesus, to see the human being in front of him. God's grace turned his heart to thoughts of forgiveness.

You will notice that these stories are not from pious sources. Of course, I could tell you stories of people for whom I act as a spiritual director, but then you might too easily write them off as something the elite might experience. I wanted to use stories from ordinary life, because that's the point of this article, namely that God is found in surprising places and people. In fact, God can be found anywhere and at every moment. We need to pay attention to the "good news," not just to the bad news that assaults us every evening in the nightly news and every day in our newspaper headlines. The world is charged with the grandeur of God. There is reason for hope in a dismal time, in fact at any time, because God has become one of us and shares our lives on this planet. God has a dream, a dream for this world of ours that is also God's own world. And, remember, God is working to bring that dream about all the time. Reason for hope, indeed. And reason for us to do our best to tune in to God's dream for our own happiness and for the good of our world.

Triangulation and the Misuse of Power:

A Dance of Victims, Villains and Rescuers

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.



The purpose of this article is to identify ways in which all of us, especially leaders, can become “triangulated” amidst conflicts and what to do about it. We will explore the nature and composition of triangles as well as the conditions that lead to their development. We will look at the roles people play in forming triangles and how we might challenge these roles in order to minimize the development of triangles. Although this article is written primarily for those in leadership, all of us, as members of any work group, committee or organization, can profit from an examination of how well we manage boundaries while in conflict with other members of our organization, be it a health care or academic system, business or religious community.

When members of an organization fail to resolve conflicts in a direct manner, they often turn to one another or leadership for help. Sometimes, when we perceive we have been unfairly treated by someone, we seek relief by complaining to others, hoping that they might do something about it or at the very least be sympathetic. If we represent our injury as “unjust,” we will typically evoke an even more sympathetic response from our confidants. Indeed, when we portray ourselves as “victims” who have been unfairly treated by some kind of “villain,” would-be “rescuers” are all too eager to help as a result of their sympathy for us or outrage toward the villain.

If an organization suffers from an ever-increasing backlog of unresolved conflicts among its members and there exists a strong pattern of sympathy-induced side-taking, “camps” made up of victims, villains and rescuers may emerge. When members seek power and safety by joining camps where loyalties are tested along “we-they” lines, both the organization and its members are adversely affected. Conflict is a natural occurrence in any organization, and if it cannot be worked with directly, but is instead ensnared in such triangular patterns, the health of that organization and its members is directly jeopardized. The spirit of those who work to fulfill its mission and the collective spirit of the organization itself is put at risk.

The destructive power of triangles is worthy of our attention. Most of us, at one time or another, have been drawn into such triangles. Each of us have propensities to play certain roles in the process of triangulation, and it would behoove us to know what these are so that we do not unwittingly succumb to such roles and advance the development of triangles. Let us begin by clarifying our terms and exploring how and why triangles are formed.

WHAT ARE TRIANGLES?

A triangle is any relationship between two people that is dependent upon a third in order to maintain the status quo. Triangular relationships are ones that have the proverbial “go-between” who mediates the relationship for the other two people. They may do this consciously and intentionally and in a helpful manner, or they may be unwittingly drawn into the triangle and participate in ways that are destructive of others.

The so-called “matchmaker” is a good example of someone who intentionally forms a triangle. The matchmaker helps bring about a relationship between two people who, if left on their own, might not form a relationship. The couple is established with the help of a third person. Therapists, councilors, mediators, and the like can also form intentional triangles, helping to assist two people who might not otherwise make it as well on their own. Leaders and those in supervisory positions also, by virtue of their role, intentionally help manage the relationships of subordinates.

Some people, regardless of their role, get drawn into triangles unwittingly. I am sure you have had someone make the innocent request, “Would you mind telling so and so, such and such, for me?” Relaying messages between two people is a concrete example of

“When members seek power and safety by joining camps where loyalties are tested along “we-they” lines, both the organization and its members are adversely affected.”

a potentially nascent triangle. This can be normal and innocent, or it can become problematic and manipulative. Passing along messages that are clear and non-conflictual in nature is usually not a problem. We all do this. However, if in a *patterned* way a third party is doing more talking *for* the other two than they are willing or able to do for themselves, then this becomes problematic. When this happens, the dyad has become *overly dependent on the third person* in order to sustain the relationship and a triangle has been formed.

A common example of this can occur when parents stay together “for the sake of the children.” The children, in this instance, are the glue that holds the marriage together. Conversation is passed through the children who act as conduits or go-betweens (e.g., “Tell your mother that I won’t be home for dinner”). Worse yet is when conflicts are worked through the children (e.g., “Tell your father to keep his mouth shut”). Without the kids, the couple would likely not talk, and if they did, they would probably break apart. In effect, the parents are dependent upon the kids who are maintaining the status quo. The children, in this instance, are being “triangulated” by their parents. It is also true that children can triangulate their parents. They can go to mom or dad to help solve conflicts with their siblings. They will tattletale in the hopes that mom or dad will take care of the problem *for* them.

It is important to note that the third leg of a triangle does not have to involve a third person. It might involve a third thing, such as work, a hobby or an addiction. Two people can remain together because this third activity helps create a homeostatic relationship. When this third leg is gone, then the homeostasis breaks down. It is common knowledge among therapists and AA participants that when an alcoholic stops drinking, the marriage often ends. The patterned way of living between the alcoholic, the co-dependent and

the alcohol (i.e., third leg) had maintained a balance that is now lost without the alcohol. When the husband retires, the marriage can fall apart because the patterned way of living around his work (i.e., the third leg) is now gone. When the third leg is gone, a couple will need to find balance in a new way or they go their separate ways.

Those in leadership are especially prone to being “triangulated” and blamed for efforts to assist or intervene on behalf of others. Perhaps this is because they are at the top of the hierarchy, and, like mom and dad, are perceived to have the power to take care of the conflicts that others cannot or will not manage themselves. Too often people do not deal directly with the person with whom they have the conflict, especially if it is with someone who is perceived to have greater power, such as those in leadership. Instead, in order to garner power, they enlist the help of others to fight their battles. Members who are perceived by others as somehow more “fragile” or less powerful are often viewed as “victims” especially at the hands of leaders who have intervened in an unwelcomed manner (e.g., requesting someone to go to treatment or leave a position). “Rescuers,” believing that such a victim cannot possibly speak for themselves, will then come to their aid by taking sides against the perceived “villains.”

This is not to suggest that members cause the triangulation of leadership or are to blame. To the contrary, leadership and membership choreograph this dance together, each contributing their missteps to this deadly dynamic. Just as parents can triangulate children, so too can leadership triangulate members. Every triangle has three participants, and all three are needed to keep the system going. Furthermore, such triangulation is not merely a leadership-membership dynamic, but one that, if left unchallenged, spreads throughout organizations at all levels, member to member and leader to leader. *Triangulation exists at all levels of an organization to the degree to which individuals are unwilling or unable to address conflicts and tensions directly and, instead, rely upon third parties to do their work for them.* Let's take a look at how triangles are formed.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF TRIANGULATION

When a third person is drawn into a conflict between two other people, they are said to be “triangulated.” In many organizations and leadership teams conflicts are not well addressed. Despite the fact that

conflicts and tension are a normal part of any relationship, the ability directly and successfully to work through conflicts is a skill often lacking, even among managers and leaders. Conflicts are frequently avoided or erupt without resolution. Often the “superior” is drawn in to mediate the conflict of others. Indeed, he or she might even handle the conflict by telling the two parties *not* to speak directly. When leadership fails, or is the subject of conflict, human resource personnel, grievance boards or lawyers may be called upon to arbitrate and settle the matter. Sadly, many people in such organizations are more familiar with this kind of triangulation of superiors than they are with the encouragement of direct conversations with their coworkers, subordinates or superiors.

Despite the many pitfalls and potential problems that come with talking through conflicts with a third person, sometimes it is helpful to talk with a third person and sometimes it is not. Let's look at when talking with a third person might lead to triangulation, when it might be helpful, and what makes the difference.

Blocked Confrontation

Most people, if given half a chance, will have urges to avoid conflict (see Figure 1). We look high and low for reasons to justify our natural fear of conflict (e.g., “It's a bad time;” “It won't do any good;” “It will just make matters worse;” “They're too fragile;” “It's not that bad;” etc.). In this situation, when persons A and B, for whatever reason, begin to avoid addressing conflicts, the effects begin to build. Issues go on unresolved, and feelings fester. Resentments build, guilt and mistrust accumulate and become the building blocks for walls that create distance. People in this situation grow further and further apart. If left uncorrected, over time such a pattern of avoidance will destroy the relationship completely.



Figure 1: Blocked Confrontation

Scapegoat

When a conflict between person A and person B is avoided (see Figure 2) and person A goes to person C *instead*, they are on their way toward forming a triangle. Person A is going to C to complain, or vent, but avoids dealing directly with person B. When the problem with B becomes the primary impetus and patterned reason for the connection between A and C, B is what we commonly refer to as a “scapegoat.” In other words, what A and C have in common is their common struggle with, or dislike of, B.

Under these circumstances, if B leaves the situation, what happens? If B leaves, A and C will either end their relationship (having nothing more in common) or

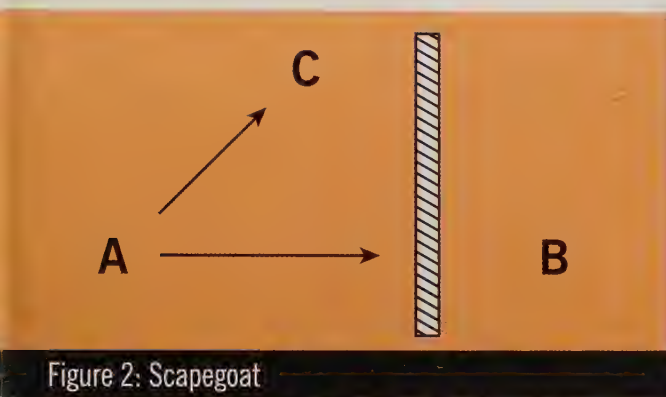


Figure 2: Scapegoat

find another scapegoat around which to keep their relationship going. Alternatively, the loss of equilibrium might evoke a transformation of their relationship so that it becomes one based upon more healthy reasons for A and C to stay together other than the common dislike of someone else.

The Triangle

In Figure 3, person A has a conflict with B, but is avoiding it. Instead, A goes to C (e.g., the superior). Because A refuses to go to B, person C goes to B in order to help resolve the situation for A. However, after talking with B, person B shares a whole other side of the story, but still refuses to talk with A, so person C goes back to A to explain B's position and feelings. Back and forth person C goes, but A and B continue to avoid one another. Under these circumstances, C is working harder than either A or B to hold their relationship together!

If you have trouble following this, then my point is made. This situation is very confusing. The point is that person C has been triangulated and has become *over-*

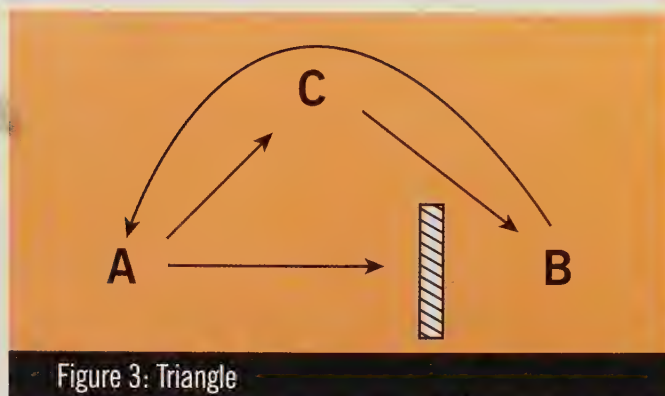


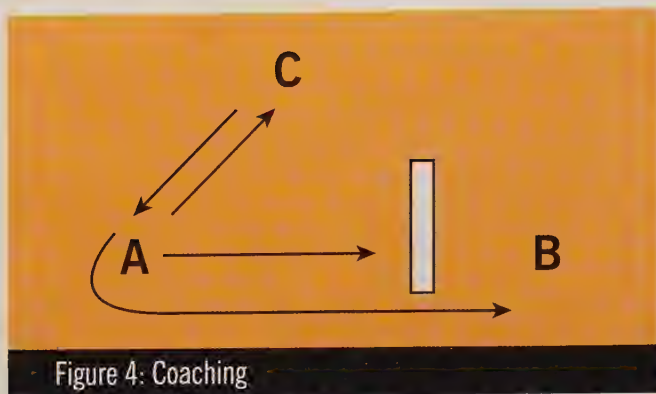
Figure 3: Triangle

ly responsible for maintaining the relationship between persons A and B. Persons A and B are not doing their own work on the relationship, and as soon as C steps out of the picture their relationship will either fail, find another person around which to triangulate or transform and develop on its own merits.

Remember that, although leadership is frequently in the rescuer position, triangles do not have to involve leadership and can exist within and across any level of an organization. Moreover, all who play a part in triangles are responsible for keeping it going, and these roles are interchangeable. A victim, once elevated in power, can easily become the rescuer or the villain (i.e., the oppressed becomes the oppressor). The rescuer, once fallen from power, can easily become a victim or villain. A villain, once vindicated, can become the rescuer or the victim. As such, a triangle is a *system* that has a homeostasis unto itself. Each part is dependent upon the others to exist (i.e., a victim needs a villain to stay a victim) and if one part changes, the others tend to exchange roles in order keep it going (or the system transforms or ends).

Coaching

While coaching (see Figure 4) looks similar to the “Scapegoat” situation (see Figure 2), there are some important differences. In Figure 4, A is in conflict with B and initially *chooses* not to deal directly. Instead, he or she goes to C. However, A goes to C not to complain or gain sympathy and leave it at that, but to sort out what to do in order to deal more responsibly and effectively with B. In other words, A goes to C for some coaching, advice and to sort things through. This is a good use of confidants, consultants or other resources. After A talks with C about it, he or she goes and deals directly with B.



Seeking consultation in order to improve your chances of resolving an otherwise irresolvable conflict is a constructive and responsible step to take. Coaching is a helpful way to involve a third person, especially if the third person is a professional helper outside of the relationship (e.g., therapist, coach, spiritual director, etc.), and ought not be something we are made to feel guilty about or prevented from doing. In these circumstances the boundaries are clear, and such “confidential” relationships do not have to be divulged to person B. However, if the third person happens to be a mutual friend or co-worker, there are potential pitfalls. Choosing to consult with a mutual friend or co-worker may be the only or best option. However, in most circumstances it would behoove person A to acknowledge to person B his or her conversation with their mutual friend or co-worker. In this way the boundaries are clean (i.e., no secrets), there is no dishonesty, and the conflict is dealt with in a direct manner after responsible preparation by person A. If such consultation is kept secret, the risk of causing more mistrust becomes greater.

In either case, whether being told of such consultation directly or discovering it indirectly, person B will likely have reactions (though these would be worse if he or she discovered it). Such reactions ought to be seen as normal and are to be expected. When you choose to talk with a mutual friend or co-worker, and this may be the best thing to do at times, be prepared to deal with the consequences of your choice. Even with your best intentions, person B may be more mistrusting, angry or embarrassed, and you will need to work this through. Nonetheless, having your friend or

co-worker upset with you *because you sought help to better the relationship* may be the better consequence to choose, than remaining at an impasse in a relationship without such consultation.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRIANGLES AND CAMPS

Undoubtedly, there are a multitude of conditions and factors that lead to the formation of triangles. However, at the risk of oversimplifying, I would like to highlight two broad conditions that I believe are primarily involved.

Conflict Avoidance

As a consultant who provides training for leadership teams and organizations to learn skills of confrontation and conflict resolution, I am convinced that triangles are the most destructive of all boundary problems and that these develop when *people choose not to deal directly with their conflicts with others*. Such conflict avoidance occurs for a variety of reasons (e.g., fear of reprisal, mistrust, believing “it won’t do any good,” etc.). Certainly, people choose a variety of ways to avoid dealing with conflict (e.g., suppression, denial, drinking, etc.), but the involvement of other people through triangulation is commonplace. *The root cause of triangulation is conflict avoidance.*

Over the years of providing training in conflict resolution, I would ask groups for their uncensored association to the word “confrontation.” With colorful descriptions and without exception, our collective association to this word *confrontation* is that it is bad, wrong, ugly and sinful. Our parents, teachers, religious educators and, most importantly, our experiences have taught us this. Most of us have been taught what *not* to do with our anger and conflicts, rather than what we can do constructively to resolve them. We have simply not been taught skills of confrontation by our parents or teachers. It should not be surprising, then, that conflict avoidance is, unfortunately, the norm.

Since we are ill-equipped and have been taught to avoid conflict, it is not hard to understand why we deal with our consternation and angst either internally (e.g., brooding, ruminating, eating, exercising, repressing, denying, etc.) or externally through the help of others. When we seek the help of others in the form of sympathy, consolation and support via “agreement” of like-minded friends and associates, then triangles become ripe for formation.

The Power of Camps

When triangulation plays out in organizations, “camps” are formed. “We-they” lines are drawn, and people are placed in certain camps according to perceived loyalties and associations. Triangles are the elemental building blocks, and triangulation is the rudimentary engine for the formation of camps. Groups of victims and rescuers align themselves against perceived villains, creating camps. There is safety in numbers, and these alliances stick together as a way to garner power and exert influence that they cannot otherwise exert. Triangles, and their derivative camps, arise because people do not handle their conflicts directly. Camps exist for one purpose and that is for *people to wield power beyond their ability to claim it through legitimate channels*.

Victims and rescuers resort to such informal structures (camps) because, for whatever reason, the formal structures of an organization have failed to provide them (or they have failed to exert themselves) with the kind of influence they need or think they deserve. The silent majority prefers the comfort of anonymity, hiding behind the voices of “others” (e.g., scapegoats and martyrs). Conflicts go underground and cannot be openly or successfully addressed. The formal structures and channels are no longer used or trusted as venues for the *real* conversations, nor for overt influence. As a result, power is covertly expressed, and the entire organization becomes disempowered because legitimate power cannot be properly channeled, harnessed and used for the sake of the organization’s mission.

Thus, there are two general conditions that give rise to the formation of triangles: 1) conflict avoidance; and, 2) a covert attempt to garner power through others. Let’s take a look at some of the specific motivations behind each of the three roles of the triangle, victims, villains and rescuers, since an understanding of these roles is key to understanding how to prevent or ameliorate triangular relationships.

THE ROLES WE PLAY

Triangles exist because of how people see themselves (victim, villain, rescuer), how they view power and how they approach conflict. We have all, at one time or another, been in the role of victim, villain and rescuer. It is important to note that only when these perceptions and approaches to life become *repeated patterns* of relating and central to our *identity* do these

“There are two general conditions that give rise to the formation of triangles: 1) conflict avoidance; and, 2) a covert attempt to garner power through others.”

roles become more fixed and do our propensities to be involved in triangles grow stronger.

Victims

People who believe that life is unfair, that they have no choice in matters and that others control them, tend to see themselves as victims. They see themselves as “stuck” in circumstances rather than seeing the choices before them and owning the choices they make (even if their choice is to stay stuck). They tend to say things like, “I can’t” instead of “I won’t” and refuse to see themselves as free agents. They feel so wronged by the villainous action of another that they need their friends and family to rally around them in sympathy and solidarity against the offender. *Being neutral is not enough and loyalty demands that you take their side.*

If you have ever been “betrayed” in a relationship, “fired,” sexually, physically, verbally or emotionally “abused,” then you know what it feels like to be “victimized.” All of us, at one time or another, have been victimized by some kind of injustice. Understandably, we want our family and friends to support us with sympathy and occasionally to stand up for us. But when such personal injustices seem to occur repeatedly, and we begin to take on the “woe is me” orientation toward life (e.g., *life is unfair, there is nothing I can do about it, etc.*), we begin to see our identity as that of “victim.” This becomes a defining characteristic of who we are. When it keeps us from growing and making responsible choices, or when it is the basis around which we form relationships in our lives, seeking out friends because they will protect us from those who might harm us, then we are on the road toward becoming a “victim.”

Victims avoid conflict like the plague. They do not believe that they have any power to influence others. The primary way they choose to protect themselves and

“Sometimes, with good intentions, we do for others what they could be doing for themselves; we protect them from the consequences of their actions; we minimize real problems, and, in so doing, we do more harm than good.”

exert influence is by garnering power through the assistance of others who are more capable. They may seek an attorney, therapist, a group of sympathetic friends, not just once in awhile, but over and over, to help give voice to their cause when they feel injured. They seek the help of others to exert power on their behalf and to take care of matters for them.

Rescuers

Those of us who are full of compassion and have a propensity to solve problems and fix things for others, to advocate for the underdog, or to fight against injustices are prone to becoming rescuers. The hallmark difference between someone who is constructively helping others and someone who is a rescuer is that rescuers rescue because they need to, not necessarily because it is needed by the one being rescued. Rescuers need constantly to be helpful. It is part of their identity. They move into action repeatedly because of an outpouring of sympathy toward the plight of others or a great need to fight against injustice.

At one level these are admirable traits. Those who fight for social justice, those in the helping professions who have an abundance of compassion, those who show mercy toward another even when they have been injured by that same person, are the very people society holds up as “good.” Justice, compassion, and mercy are virtues. However, these traits become less virtuous, even destructive forces, when we are compelled to *do for others what they can or ought to do for themselves*. These propensities, while well-intentioned, are destructive when we protect others from the consequences of their own actions and consequently prevent them from learning.

Parents who cannot discipline their children because they love them too much to let them incur

appropriate, albeit painful consequences for bad behavior (e.g., being grounded) are not being loving in a mature sense of the word. They are not helping their children to grow, to take responsibility for their actions, to experience the very pain that might cause one to change one’s behavior. They are enabling irresponsible behavior. The boss who protects subordinates from the consequences of their actions is making the same error.

Co-workers may show mercy to “friends” who repeatedly get into trouble for irresponsible drinking (or gambling) by fixing the damage done, consoling them or minimizing the problem. In the name of mercy, compassion or friendship they would rather ease their friend’s pain than confront them with the real life-damaging effects of their destructive behavior and challenge them to seek treatment. When such behavior is repeated over time, it makes a mockery of mercy and enables another’s disease or problems to continue unchecked.

When we treat others as if they were cripples, we cripple them. Sometimes, with good intentions, we do for others what they could be doing for themselves; we protect them from the consequences of their actions; we minimize real problems, and, in so doing, we do more harm than good. Sometimes, out of *our need* to help, we disempower others rather than empower them. We prevent them from taking personal responsibility rather than enable them to do so.

Villains

Those of us who are seen by others as “intimidating,” who are presumed to take power and voice away from others, are often labeled villains. We are not given this exact label, of course; rather we are called “domineering,” “controlling,” “crazy,” a “bitch,” “hierarchical,” “exclusive” and other pejorative labels of our day. We, who are seen by others as having injured them “unjustly” or “abused” them wrongly, are seen as villains, as “evil-doers.” Victims need sympathy, and rescuers need to justify their actions; so we demonize others who have harmed us. The more we can dehumanize them, the easier it becomes to vilify and act against them in ways that exempt us from any possible reproach.

Most of us do not want to play the part of villain. We are given these attributes by others who need to be excused for their actions and find someone else to blame (e.g., “Your demanding boss is the problem not you.” “Your obnoxious co-worker is the problem, not you”). Rescuers and victims need a villain, or they

could not carry out their role.

This is not to say that villains are completely innocent or do not participate in some way in earning the label. Some people are domineering and controlling and will be judged accordingly. Some people are abusive in their use of power, and villains get something out of being a villain, no matter how ruinous to their reputation. Whether the term is earned in some small way and exaggerated by others, or whether there has been obvious abuse of others, the key to becoming a villain is that acting abusively becomes a patterned way of interacting over time, perceived to be part of one's identity. A "reputation" is born, and this person becomes ripe for involvement in triangular dynamics.

SUGGESTIONS TO DEAL WITH TRIANGULATION

In order to minimize your risk of participating in triangles, or to help your organization or leadership team reduce such risk, there are a number of constructive efforts you might want to consider.

Recognize the role you and others tend to play

What part of the triangle are you most prone to playing, rescuer, victim, or villain? If you know your propensity and the potential pitfalls, you can be more vigilant and make better choices. Do you have, or know anyone in your organization, with such reputations? If you can recognize the role that you or others are playing, then you will be better able to challenge and change the dynamics at play.

Rescuer: What's the difference between someone who helps and someone who rescues? Many like to root for the underdog, but if you are someone who, in a *patterned* way, finds yourself rescuing others, being a voice for the voiceless, championing the causes of others, then you might wish to reflect upon whether you are enabling or preventing growth on their part. Are you protecting them from responsibilities they ought to take, or are you helping them grow stronger in their efforts? Are you rushing in to help because you cannot stand the thought of not helping (i.e., it is meeting *your* need) or are you asking them if they want help in the first place and, if so, what kind (i.e., meeting *their* needs)? Do you know others who have this tendency?

Victim: Do you tend to see yourself as a victim when you are in conflict or have been injured? Do you

Are you rushing in to help because you cannot stand the thought of not helping (i.e., it is meeting your need) or are you asking them if they want help in the first place?"

often say or think to yourself things that suggest you have no choice or power (e.g., "*I have no choice.*" "*Whatever they want to do is fine with me.*" "*It doesn't matter what I say, they're going to do whatever they're going to do.*" etc.). Do you choose your friends because they will side with you, take care of you or avoid confronting you? Do you know others who exhibit this pattern of relating?

Villain: Even when you play the unwanted role of villain, perhaps there is something you are doing that spurs this on. Perhaps you begin as a rescuer, but go overboard and insist upon helping. This can create "hostile dependency" (i.e., a build-up of resentment by those who feel trapped in a dependency relationship). Once idealized and needed, you now fall from the pedestal and are seen as the villain. You can be seen as too controlling or domineering.

Consider how well you share power with others. Perhaps when you are upset and in conflict, you tend to "blame" others and have difficulty acknowledging your contribution to the problems. These edges in your personality can make you prone to being targets of others. Do you see this in yourself or in others?

Redirect conversations

If you can recognize how you might be triangulated and how others participate, you can begin to redirect conversations that are triangular in nature. Challenge would-be victims who seek your support and who insist that you agree with them. Rather than enable helplessness, offer to coach them or to refer them to someone who can. Help them find constructive and personally responsible ways to address whatever conflicts they are encountering. Offer empathy rather than outright agreement (if you don't agree). Rather than take their side against another, side with their healthy efforts to take personal responsibility.

With would-be rescuers, challenge them to examine whose need is really being met. Encourage them to ask the other if they even want help and, if they do, what kind of assistance they need. Encourage them to refrain from doing more for others than they can do for themselves, and help them recognize how disempowering this might be. Encourage them not to take sides as a show of support, but to help by allowing the other to grow stronger.

Challenge villains to look at the grain of truth that might be found in the accusations that are exaggerated. Support them by helping them see how they might unwittingly be playing into the hands of potential rescuers and victims. Help them find a way out of the role that perpetuates their being charged as a villain. Help all persons involved in ways that foster direct, honest and open conversation in an effort to resolve their differences.

Learn skills of confrontation and educate your organization or community

What do you do when you are hurt by or angry with someone with whom you live or work? Do you address it directly or find other ways to manage the pain? Triangles are a way to deal with conflict indirectly and to exert power covertly. The primary antidote to the proliferation of triangles is to learn ways to use power and handle conflicts directly and constructively.

From years of training people in these skills I will tell you that the hardest part of gaining these skills is the unlearning of old habits. The skills of confrontation and conflict resolution are not terribly difficult to learn, but one-time workshops or reading a book will not create the kind of change that is substantive or lasting. Training with the help of a coach, therapist or a program *over time* is essential because years of forming unhelpful habits and attitudinal barriers get in our way and need to be challenged not just once, but repeatedly in order to change.

Ideally, the best way for an organization to extricate itself successfully from perpetual problems with triangulation is for each and every member *to find their voice so that they do not have to rely on someone else to speak for them; to learn skills for handling conflicts directly; and to clear up boundaries that are confusing, dysfunctional or encouraging of triangulation.* This is a costly

and time-consuming endeavor, but considering the time and costs of the alternative, it may be a critical move to make for the long term health of an organization.

Consultation and Intervention

If you are currently caught in a triangular relationship and cannot free yourself from this dynamic despite your best efforts, then seek consultation. If others are caught and have come to you for help, but you have not found answers that have alleviated the situation, then seek help. Seek the help of a consultant, facilitator, or therapist who has the qualifications and resources to assist you with such matters. Choosing a consultant who is outside the organization or has no conflict of interest may be an important consideration (see *Coaching* article on page 27).

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IGNITING THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE THROUGH COACHING

Katherine Carol



Firing up the perfect blend of purpose, performance, passion and profit is at the heart of coaching. We can greatly expand existing resources when we cultivate the talents and skills of the people in our organizations. Coaching achieves this. One recent study in the public sector showed that training, when done alone, increases employee productivity by 23%; coaching *and* training increases it by 88%.

The goal of most managers is to foster the finest qualities in an organization while providing a welcoming environment for employees. This welcoming environment takes into consideration employee desires, objectives and differences, and is often a challenge to create.

Coaching can enhance current management and human resource efforts. It ranges from traditional personnel management to the inspiration and development of individual employees. When you look at the concept of coaching, it makes sense—particularly when you are striving to increase your organizational capacity by increasing personal capacity. A helpful and powerful synergy occurs when the employees who are serving the greater good also experience personal and professional growth.

Here is my vision of a vital and effective organization: an organ-

“Corporations using coaching are seeing not only improvements in an individual’s performance, but also increased profits, customer satisfaction and greater retention of talented employees.”

ization comprised of a team of professionals who live to make a positive difference at work and in their communities. Each person shares a bond with other team members, experiencing and developing a level of trust that promotes calculated risk-taking and reduces fear. Organizational and personal growth occurs in the fertile ground of a high-trust work environment, resulting in higher productivity, which can be sustained without pressure or expensive reward systems.

I envision a team vividly living the mission every-day, standing shoulder-to-shoulder and arm-in-arm, doing high performance work. I see in my mind’s eye a great group of excited, passionate partners full of ideas and strategies. I see an employee who seeks to take on more responsibilities and strives to improve his or her life. It is not difficult to attract new people and resources to such an organization when the internal environment is supportive of its team members.

THE PROBLEM

This is the vision; the reality is often something else. Creating that kind of success in today’s world, where nothing seems certain, is more challenging than ever. The rules keep changing—sometimes daily. What worked yesterday may still work today, but people want more from us—faster, better, cheaper—and with more choices. *They want to feel the passion and see the results—NOW!* All of this occurs amidst fluctuating human and financial resources.

THE ANSWER

The answer lies in focusing on core competencies. It also means providing an atmosphere of imaginative grace as programs and services simply and elegantly evolve

through leadership development and the best-proven practices. This is the principal strategy in high-performing organizations. Why is it that many organizations have trouble getting past basic training and orientation?

Effective training combined with a strong internal coaching program can increase results dramatically. Coaching can be used to improve employee and manager skills in the following areas:

- Communication
- Career and Personal Growth
- Job Satisfaction
- Relationship with Coworkers and Supervisors
- Leadership Development
- Supervision
- Organizational and Personal Values
- Negotiation Strategies
- Decision-making Skills
- Work / Life Balance

According to *Business Week* magazine (January 10, 2000), coaching has become a legitimate industry. Corporations using coaching are seeing not only improvements in an individual’s performance, but also increased profits, customer satisfaction and greater retention of talented employees. Additionally, employees report more self-confidence, stronger skills and more goals achieved, along with better relationships as a result of coaching. Coaching works.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Coaching takes a variety of forms. Some are strictly performance-based or skill-specific and designed for quick improvement in a limited area of concern. Others are more transformational and growth-oriented. An example of performance-based coaching comes from an executive who recently approached me needing help to make a job change. His concerns were twofold: first, how could he ensure that the new job was structured in a way to meet his emotional needs, financial needs and talents? The second was how to position himself with the existing organization so the exit would be relatively smooth. A tough challenge, since relationships within the organization he was leaving were tense and fear-based. Elegant exits are challenging. This is where coaching can be quite effective. It can provide

an objective perspective by discovering the client's patterns of high performance. With this client, I started by reexamining his choice of employers and worked to discover his conscious and unconscious motivations for reselecting his chosen profession.

The coaching approach in this situation consisted of a series of one- to two-hour sessions every week for a month. The coaching relationship was centered on redeveloping a management plan for the new job and carefully negotiating an exit plan from the current position. Through observation and a systematic approach using questions that were both reflective and action-oriented, we discovered together a repetitive and often ineffective pattern of decision-making and found that many of the client's actions were based on inaccurate assumptions.

A coach can be particularly effective in bringing a symptomatic pattern to the individual's attention and in helping him or her discover new ways of approaching similar situations more effectively. One way is to help clients examine their value systems and compare them to their actions and decision-making patterns. If a substantial gap exists between values and actions, words and deeds, the client may be pushing ahead aggressively while, at the same time, applying the brakes. This results in reduced effectiveness and increased stress and frustration. It is at this point that the coach will offer observations and help the client examine the impact his or her current pattern is having on long-range goals.

I helped my client with a mix of *Lazer* (quick, 5-10 minute) sessions and longer sessions that resulted in a very satisfied executive, who was surprised to find that he had actually exceeded his own initial expectations. (*Lazer sessions are quick and concise coaching sessions that are very topic specific. For instance: "I had a confrontation with my boss today, and I am not sure how to handle it."*) Confidently armed with new skills, this executive can now eagerly dive into a new job with a concrete plan for developing relationships with his new team, and strategies for building a high-trust work environment that cultivates strategic innovation.

Another coaching relationship used the proximity of working together to achieve personal, health-related goals that two co-workers had. Both individuals needed to adopt a healthier lifestyle or risk some serious complications. They set goals around healthy eating and exercise, trusting one another to look at why they had not been pursuing a better style of living already.

"A coach can be particularly effective in bringing a symptomatic pattern to the individual's attention and in helping him or her discover new ways of approaching similar situations more effectively."

They used a well-known coaching technique called "Questioning" to get at the "root causes," not just the symptoms of the problems. Their relationship was a strong one. Therefore, with the permission of both parties to ask why and how questions, they were successful in getting to the heart of their issues.

Some examples of questions that are used to gain understanding are:

1. What do we need to understand about this situation?
2. What facts are we missing or misinterpreting?
3. What do you want?
4. What do you see?
5. What did you learn?

Solution-oriented questions are used to create options, which lead to more concrete action.

1. What choices do we have to solve this problem?
2. What can we do to improve the outcome in this case?
3. What direction would help us take advantage of this situation?

If solution questions are not working, then "possibility questions" are very helpful. Just changing the wording slightly can generate more creative thinking.

1. If there were a "must do," what would it be?
2. If you could improve this in any way possible, how would you do it?
3. What might be a way to solve this problem?
4. Well, if it could work, what would we do?
5. If money was available and the rules were suspended, what would be the first thing you would do?

The questioning techniques also develop strategies to help the people you are working with move past their limitations. Oftentimes, management methods focus on quick fixes rather than listening for the root causes. Questioning helps us find the best solution rather than just any solution. Questioning the people

being coached on what solutions they see leads to a greater investment in follow-through, resulting in greater accomplishments.

Coaching can be expanded beyond individuals to groups. I frequently coach work teams on project development, offering tele-classes and coaching sessions for groups of individuals seeking personal and professional growth. We use a conference call or telebridge, allowing people from a variety of locations to call in, facilitating goal-setting, decision-making, barrier identification and brainstorming. This helps people see patterns of peak performance. Coaching can enhance and further develop those abilities; it is similar to the training of a great athlete. Remember, even Tiger Woods has a coach. It also gives us a chance to look for patterns of inefficiency or breakdown, which of course we want to reframe and replace with more productive actions.

Ideally, coaching is focused on meeting the agenda of the individual. Under organizational coaching circumstances, a manager or supervisor may set the agenda. Having an outside coach facilitating the “management goals” is often how organizations initiate a coaching program. Having an objective third party can be quite effective. These programs work with rising company stars, as well as with employees who are struggling with their performance or work/life balance concerns.

Organizations have another option—using managers as coaches. Managers who have good communication and people skills can be very effective in coaching their staff or the staff of other company managers. A word of caution here: some managers who try to coach a member of their team have a fear-based management style. What they end up doing is just telling people to improve without taking the necessary time to develop weekly goals or coaching them on how to meet them. They often miss the key ingredients of listening, discovery, dealing with logistics and providing the solid tools necessary for success.

To start a coaching program in your organization, begin with these steps.

1. Decide to invest in your organization and start a coaching program.
2. Start small.
3. Recruit interested individuals who would like to be coached or need to be.
4. Decide if you want to hire an outside coach or develop your own inside coaching program (or a combination of both).
5. For inside coaching, select your coaches, define the coaching process, train your coaches and then match them with those seeking a coach.
6. To hire a coach, develop criteria describing your coaching needs, send out a proposal, conduct interviews, and then select coaches or a coaching organization.
7. Review and evaluate the program, then make adjustments.

Then enjoy the quantum leap in your organizational productivity!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Contact Katherine Carol at 888-706-0176 or kcarol@startdial.net and mention coaching in the subject line. More information is available at www.tangoresults.com

International Federation of Coaches:
www.coachfederation.org

Coach University: www.coachu.com



Katherine Carol is a speaker, coach, consultant, and author. She works with organizations and people to weed out broken belief systems and performance patterns which limit success and future security. Katherine has worked with organizations across the country for the past twelve years.

The Head of Charles the First

James Torrens, S.J.

WHERE WERE WE, GOD?

I do so love talking to you,
dear God, and have felt the draw
to contemplation always,
just as Saint Teresa, the all-out,
but here goes my inner
cell phone, sorry, you know who
coming to mind again, big mouth,
up till all hours, messy.
How can you stand her?

Right. Where were we, God?
Yes, mulling the gospel scene.
Jesus, the patient teacher,
expounds from a boat offshore,
crowds hanging on his words.
Lucky them. I must say no teacher,
Lord, ever inspired me.
Long years of school a waste.
Spilt milk.

Okay, okay,
I'm back to my bit of gospel.
You taught with authority, it says.
Great! That will show
the stuffed shirts. Authorities
keep putting on their act.
You can't tell them, the boobs.
Oh well. Come, Holy Spirit,
and help me focus. So let's see,
where were we, God?

In the growing-up novel *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, young David's wonderfully eccentric Aunt Betsey is caring for a cheery gentleman named Mr. Dick. Mr. Dick does not enjoy all his faculties, yet his human instincts are genuine. He faces a big problem. He and his sister have been cheated out of property by their brother, so Mr. Dick is engaged in

writing a Memorial to the Lord Chancellor, "or the Lord Somebody or other," as Aunt Betsey explains. He sits down to write daily but can never get very far in recording his trauma without mentioning the decapitation of King Charles the First. The head of the king, Aunt Betsey says to David, is "the figure or the simile or whatever it's called for his great disturbance and agitation." This has been going on for ten years and innumerable discarded pages.

To take Mr. Dick as a simile, isn't this what happens often to our prayers? Something that bugs us keeps intruding itself into them. Something or somebody who gets us down is never very far away. The most trivial irritations can do it, such as the eccentricities or blind spots of those we live with. We notice that so-and-so does not do cleanup, or that somebody else is compulsive about it—anything will do for a pebble in the shoe to keep us from tranquility in our converse with God and neighbor.

Much more grave affairs can lodge in our memory too or serve as an open wound to our indignation—rebuffs, injustices, scoldings merited or unmerited, slights imaginary or real, less than perfect evaluations. Superiors have failed to appreciate us. Colleagues have done us a nasty turn. Somebody in the bosom of our family has gravely offended. Any of these inner disturbances can act as the head of King Charles the First, ready to pop into our prayer because they are lodged in our spirit.

We fret about the distractions hampering our prayer. Many of them can hardly be helped, those concerning decisions that face us or worrisome business at hand. It can be a help and a relief to put these matters before the Lord and try to leave them there. "Bad thoughts" are the distractions so often mentioned in confession—sexual imagery, lustful impulses, occasioned by oneself just as often as not. But there is something humbling about these fantasies and scenarios. They have the whiff of carnality. We long for purity of heart, to be free of them.

We have more to be concerned about in the distractions coming from our offended ego. We dwell with disapproval on someone's way of acting. We impute some trouble or indignity that we suffer to specific peo-

ple. Yet the source of our aggravation is mostly within ourselves. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, one of the Hassidic masters of the 19th century, put it cogently: "You are wherever your thoughts are." Absent from God is where we can be, ragging at someone.

Dante Alighieri, in the "Purgatory" section of his *Divine Comedy*, presents an image of the effects of anger. The penitents who are being purified of this sin stumble along through thick black smoke, their eyes smarting unendurably. The poet is illustrating the darkened ambience and the damaged vision of one prone to anger.

Saint Basil, in the 4th century, once delivered a fiery homily "Against Anger." He had in mind the kind that lodges within us lastingly as well as the kind that erupts into some spasm. "Anger destroys even the prudent," he says, quoting from *Proverbs* (15:1). "It does not allow one to become a human being, since one no longer has the help of reason." What a thought! By anger we let ourselves be blinded to God's work and to our own humble status and to the worthiness of others. Saint Basil adds that the person who "holds tight to provocations" does not differ much from the demons, either in appearance or in the disposition of their soul. He did well to add: "Give your thoughts the opportunity to choose the good portion" ("Against Anger," *On the Human Condition*, Popular Patristics Series. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005). So often, in anger, the harshness of the world feeds into the harshness of the self. Pretty obviously anger is bad for the heart.

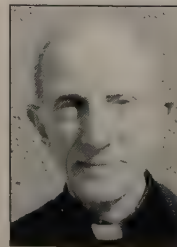
We know that anger arises naturally and often justifiably. Jesus displays it to a surprising degree in his public life. He was angered by whatever he saw as making life oppressive and burdensome for others. Hypocrisy and Pharisaism, demonic influence and even death made him angry. But we can rest assured that he did not let any of that fester. When he prayed to the Father, he was all attention, rapt. Rapture is a gift, to be sure, but an unquiet spirit will block its very possibility. We know how often anger against injustice has been a

strong motivating power for good, but we also know that too often it can sour and consume the agent.

Jesus in the "Our Father" has us bestow forgiveness on anyone who has sinned against us. This is the best response, in fact, to the distraction of anger: pray for the supposed offender. Make some effort at recognizing and understanding why someone acts in such-and-such a way, but above all lift him or her up to God. By parable and explicit admonition Jesus kept underlining the centrality of brotherly and sisterly forgiveness. His insistence lets us know that this is no easy lesson, and the internal history of many parishes and religious congregations bears him out.

We can pray the "Our Father" under the illusion that we, at least, do not really have anyone to forgive. We find ourselves thanking God for that. Sooner or later, though, some circumstance, some memory, the mention of someone's name will pop up to disabuse us of this illusion. "Oh yes, I'd forgotten about such-and-such, or so-and-so," we will admit, if we are attentive and honest.

Saint Paul can be allowed the last word on this matter, as on so many others. He was a man of passions and emotions, as his letters reveal. Yet he writes some cautionary words which can be a great help: "If you are angry, let it be without sin. The sun must not go down on your wrath; do not give the devil a chance to work on you" (Ephesians 4:26-27). Saint Paul is really saying, Do not let anger infect your sleep. Do not let it hang on and on. He would add, for sure, Do not let anger infect your prayer. Charles Dickens has already put this imaginatively: Do not let the head of King Charles the First roll into your prayer.



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Ideological Struggle in the Church:

WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?

George B. Wilson, S.J.



Look around in just about any direction these days and you will be confronted with commentary about divisions within the Catholic church. Most often people will describe it in terms like “the conservatives vs. the liberals.” Sometimes the political language of “left” and “right” is used. The word “polarization” is frequently heard. And from time to time the rhetoric is even ratcheted way up and the fearsome specter of—gasp!—*schism* is flashed on the screen. The list of subjects around which the divisions are revealed comes easily to mind: norms of sexual morality, whether for straights or gays; liturgy and sacraments and the way they are to be celebrated; ordination of women or re-admission to ministry of married priests; church involvement in social justice issues; etc., etc.

Serious business all this, not to be sprinkled away with a quick shake of holy water and two Hail Marys.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that a lot of the commentary could be misplaced, focusing on the surface phenomena and missing what is really going on. The ideological wars just might be diverting our attention from a more profound struggle, one centering neither on the policies the church is seen to be espousing nor even on the fundamental beliefs that purport to anchor those poli-

“Ideology is a passionate commitment to half the truth.”

cies. I would suggest that the real arena of the struggle is not policy or doctrine but spirituality.

Re-framing the issue in that way will not diminish the reality and pain of the clash, of course—the differences are real, and placing the issue in the realm of the spirit does not take away the babble of confusing voices. In fact, seeing the issue as one of spirituality raises the stakes considerably. What is going on is a campaign for the very spirit or soul of every member of the faithful and of the church itself.

But a new look may serve to untie energies presently tangled in ideological knots, and free them for better purposes.

UTOPIA AND INCARNATION

If the issue is not ideological polarization, then where else might the struggle have its origins? Two spiritualities are at war within the Christian community today. It is not a new struggle. They were locked in combat in the Judaism of Jesus’ day and have been ever since. From contemporary evidence, however, it is safe to say that the intensity has increased in recent years.

In what follows, I will be presenting two *typologies*. As such, they are not found in pure form in any given individual. We are all mixtures of the two orientations I describe. But if we hold them apart in black-white fashion, it can be a helpful heuristic device for framing our situation. That, in turn, may guide us to more effective approaches toward healing in our church.

One of these spiritualities I will call utopianism. It arises out of the attractiveness of purity and clarity, of univocity and light, of resolution and definition. By way of a kind of short-hand let’s designate people whose

approach to life is governed *predominantly* by this attitude as utopians. Such individuals are repelled by the remotest chance that absolute standards (*their* standards, to be sure) might be fudged. It’s black or it’s white; angel or demon; it is or it ain’t. Gray is the worst of all options (the possibility of a rainbow does not even come up for consideration). In the epistemological realm, analogy becomes anathema; to suggest that there could be reasonable distinctions to be made is treated as betrayal. In the political arena, compromise becomes a four-letter word. In its extreme form the person becomes an ideologue. More on that later.

That kind of spirituality is seductive. If it weren’t, it wouldn’t have the adherents it does. Purity attracts us as light draws a moth. It is a kind of grail that has led to many a children’s crusade. We *are* all drawn to the infinite.

The trouble with such a spirituality, though, is that we humans have to live in a world of the finite, of mixed goods, of truths that do not stand alone but are interwoven with a complexity not easy to untangle. Very few questions with real choices among alternatives are matters of either-or principles. Most are matters for prudential weighing and costly responsibility. While we sojourn on this earth, infinity—for all its attractiveness—equals utopia. No place. Illusion. The most attractive gods are the most simple and, as the long history of discernment of spirits warns us, the most deceptive.

THE REALM OF THE IDEOLOGUES

One of the present-day manifestations of utopianism is the clash of the ideologues. For them there is no quarter to be given, not an inch to be ceded. They are the contemporary Manichees, as black-and-white as ever they were in Augustine’s day—and how completely that neat world-view held him in its thrall, for years!

When does a garden-variety utopian morph into a full-blown ideologue? When the need for purity becomes so strong that the person blots out, not just the conflicting positions of others, but parts of the ideologue’s *own experience*. True ideologues become incapable of registering any reality that might threaten the security of their pure position. As my colleague Roger Ridgway puts it, “Ideology is a passionate commitment to half the truth.” In colloquial speech we pin the phenomenon quite well: “Don’t bother me with facts, my mind is *made up*!”

Once we begin to explore the spiritual ground of

The ideologue, however, there is an interesting discovery awaiting us: the *content* of the ideologue's position is quite unimportant. Ideology, it turns out, is not a matter of content. It's an attitude—which can clothe itself in either of two extreme content positions.

Ideologue of the left or ideologue of the right? It matters little; they're really just mirror images of one another. In fact, it becomes clear that the ideologue holding one black-and-white answer to the issue is actually kept in existence by the one holding its opposite. The ideological left and right need each other desperately. They are a single attitudinal system. Without the opposing ideology ideologues are frustrated; they have no place to deposit their anxieties. Two to tango and all that. No opposite, no tango; being left on the dance floor alone is the worst of humiliations. In U.S. politics, take away a Ted Kennedy and a Tom DeLay and the world fulminates in a vacuum. In the church, the Francis Kisslings and Mother Angelicas simply co-create one another. (In using these specific names to make my point, I intend no judgment of the personal integrity of any of these individuals. I know none of them personally, and it would be arrogance for me to judge them even if I did. I use their names as pointers only, referring to the public personae presented to us by the media, which is the only way most of us know their existence anyway.) To use a less personal example: why else does *The Wanderer* cruise from one setting to another looking for yet one more spook to take aim at, except that without a target its ammunition would implode? And, lest this appear to be an attack on the right, *Mother Jones* and *Sojourners* are not altogether free of the same tendency either: is it heresy to suggest that a multinational corporation might have *some* redeeming value?

The subject matter, the position espoused, is not what constitutes the ideologue. People become ideologues by virtue of a basic attitude they bring to the subject—and to anyone else who would dare to risk jousting with them. Disagree with the ideologue, or even attempt a distinction, and the best response to be hoped for is scorn; much more likely comes tired dismissal. The issue *and* the answer are clear; why engage in self-criticism when it is only unsettling?

It is not my aim here to try to discover the psychological dynamics that give rise to the attitudinal stance of the ideologues. People more skilled in psychology than I can help us all by exploring that territory. My focus is rather the significance that we frequently give

“Ideologue of the left or ideologue of the right? It matters little; they're really just mirror images of one another.”

to the ideologues in our understanding of the social situation of the church (or civil society for that matter).

THE SPIRITUALITY OF INCARNATION

If it is characteristic of utopian purity that it has no home in a world of finite reality, a spirituality of incarnation is *very much* placed. “Incarnation” bespeaks body, and that involves engagement with limitation. Flesh is, after all, inherently bumpy and opaque (not to mention utterly transient). The world of incarnation is the rough-edged and the problematic, the tentative and inchoate and flawed. Here there is little that is closed and once-for-all settled. Experience, unlike abstract formulation, is never adequately captured in concepts; the residue of what cannot be articulated nags at us, demanding expression. It is Oliver Twist tugging at the sleeve and asking “Please, more porridge?” Even the deed once placed never fully discloses its meaning but remains always subject to fresh wonder and re-interpretation. (Witness our two-thousand-year old search for who Jesus *really* was—and the kaleidoscope of answers the search has produced.)

Incarnationalists (remember, there are no pure specimens in our world; we are using short-hand to designate persons whose *predominant* orientation compels them to hold onto all the facets of what they are experiencing) are not *uninterested* in the subjects around which the ideologues buzz. But their predominant concern is the full concrete reality to be confronted and responded to, the life to be lived, rather than the generic question to be unriddled. For people guided by such an incarnational spirituality the “question” is not in the first instance the principle proscribing abortion;

“Incarnationalists focus on the parish community aching for lack of a Eucharistic presider, not the principle which precludes change in the rule of celibacy. They are wrenched by the story of the young gay man who just committed suicide as his final response to intolerable social stigma, not some debate over disordered nature.”

they are pre-occupied with the enfleshed form of the unmarried pregnant woman standing in front of them looking for support while facing pressures scarcely to be imagined by someone not standing in her shoes. Incarnationalists focus on the parish community aching for lack of a Eucharistic presider, not the principle which precludes change in the rule of celibacy. They are wrenched by the story of the young gay man who just committed suicide as his final response to intolerable social stigma, not some debate over disordered nature.

Incarnationalists live immersed in the intractable specifics of the present, where the limpid answer of unqualified principle is lost in the babble of a thousand variables—and yet decision, and with it responsibility, is unavoidable. I suspect that the burden of jury duty, with its responsibility to correlate clear laws with facts that don't 'fit,' must feel like a cold shower for utopians. A murder case is not a disputation in Salamanca.

Because the utopian attraction, if left undisciplined, can lead us to hardened ideologies at either the left or the right end of the spectrum of possible responses to issues, it could be an easy trap to identify incarnationism as the adopting of a middle-of-the-road position between competing extreme answers. That would be to fall back into the very perspective I am suggesting we need to challenge. It would make incarnationism, which is a prevailing attitude toward reality, into one more content position, merely adding a few more positions along the spectrum between the extremes.

Nor is it right to conclude that for the incarnationist there are no fixed principles. In fact for the incarnationist there just may be *too many* principles, all

reliable and each equally clamoring for hegemony—hiding within a forest of facts that stubbornly avoid the glare that might come from full exposure to a single self-evident principle. The incarnationist knows that wheat is wheat and weeds are weeds, but that doesn't mean it's easy—or even wise—to assume we know which is which and actually start pulling things up too soon. Too many harvests have been aborted, too much good thwarted by utopians operating out of that kind of clarity.

Nor does the existence of an incarnational spirit imply the absence of passion. Incarnation is not bloodless ambivalence. The incarnationist may have strong convictions about particular answers to difficult questions and may voice them in public forums, but those convictions are only one component within a wider matrix of concerns. The convictions are important, to be sure, but they yield in importance to the preoccupation with the day-by-day demands of love (which Ignatius reminds us is always embodied) and the uncomfortable discernment of what love might require in the present moment.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

But even if it be agreed that the perspective I am suggesting has some validity, what help does it offer? We seem to be no better off in this scenario than in the prevailing image of a left-right war presented as gospel by our media. In either case there is a struggle going on. “Church” remains an arena of tension, not comfort.

Three responses come to mind.

The first concerns the accuracy of the two presentations. Which one corresponds to the experience of most of our church communities? My own sense is that thousands of local faith communities, stressed as they may be by the turmoil surrounding these pointed issues of church policy and belief, are not nearly so much obsessed by them as the left-right descriptors would suggest. They are quite aware that the ideologies are up there doing star wars on the big screen—they may even cheer as one side or the other scores a point from time to time—but it's not the main show for them. For most, I would suspect that Terri Schiavo was probably an occasion for small-talk; much more pressing was the issue of how to interpret the signs of Uncle Fred's increasing dementia. They have a life. Apart from an occasional local tragedy occasioned by local actions by local players, church schism remains a very remote possibility, scarcely contemplated. Not that

obedience to church authority is so thoroughly accepted or the possibility of rejecting it so repugnant. My guess is that for most of these good people, wrestling daily with the competing attractions of utopia and incarnation, institutional authority itself just does not occupy a very high rung on the ladder of what is important to their understanding of the life of the spirit. How much sleep are you losing over the evolution-vs.-intelligent design brouhaha?

The picture of a left-right polarization on the hot-button issues in our church is a distortion because it is so *incomplete*. It leaves about—let's pick a number—30% of the church's life off the screen. It's as if one were to describe our U.S. political scene for a visiting Martian while including in the picture only the members of the Republican and Democratic national or local committees. Open up the lens on the camera and include the multitudes who live their daily spiritual journey and have to make most of their choices among shades of gray, and the picture becomes very different indeed. If focus on the left-right struggle is the dominant 'problem' to be confronted, we could easily expend our energies on misguided strategies, not because we came up with the wrong answers but because we focused on the wrong questions in the first place.

Beyond that, if the ideologues of the left and the right, in spite of their differences on the issues, are actually a single co-constituting system, then the division in the church assumes a very different character, and a different prognosis emerges. There is a divide. But it is not where the left-right polarity situates it. On one side of this re-aligned divide stand the entrenched utopian ideologues—of *both* the left and the right—who (for whatever motives) raise the cry that the sky is falling, because church leadership isn't siding with their absolute truth and rejecting the other guy's truth. Across from them on the other side of the divide are the great body of the faithful for whom the Fox News version of church life is only pop-corn on the carnival midway. They may indeed feel pain or elation at the answers the leadership of the church seems to be giving in any particular instance. They may even, on occasion, join a public outcry in support or opposition. But basically they have made their peace with an all-too-human and sinful church-on-pilgrimage and are willing to inch along slowly with few absolute trail-markers, believing that the will of the Spirit will prevail over time. They are in touch with the parables of the kingdom: seeds and weeds for now, harvests only later. The

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tension remains, but the ability to live within it comes from a very different source.

Re-aligning the picture in that way can also alert us to the kind of power we may be wantonly throwing overboard by accepting at face value the now almost stereotypical left-right analysis. By casting the ideologues as the major players in the ecclesiastical and social dramas we give them a degree of influence that is not warranted by their non-contribution to the reasonable discourse that searches for wisdom. Half the truth never frees; it only perpetuates unfreedom.

From such a re-casting another implication becomes clearer. If the spotlight is to be turned away from the ideologues, then regular, on-going vehicles of discussion are needed in which the wisdom of a people not locked into ideological simplicities, a genuine *sensus fidelium*, has a chance of coalescing and becoming a public voice. Whether that takes the form of a diocesan synod or forums of various kinds at which the shouting can be contained and a genuine—humbling—search for wisdom can take place among the people of our parishes and dioceses, it needs to happen. The aim of such conversation is not the resolution of questions of absolute principles but the discovery of prudentially wise courses of action to respond to concrete situations where single absolute principles prove too ethereal for effective guidance. In the absence of such forums the tabloids will continue to reinforce the picture of heated ideological conflict because that's what sells.

THE PERSONAL CHALLENGE

The re-framing of the issue that confronts us as a church has one final consequence. It is sobering, because it cuts more closely to our spiritual nerves.

As long as the issue is cast in terms of right-left responses to questions the media chooses to focus on, it remains for each of us personally something “out there.” Oh, I may well have my position on the issue, leaning toward one answer or the other. But nothing in that scenario compels me to any self-criticism or disturbing soul-searching, much less action. It is about as engaging as reading a public opinion poll. “62% believe X, 35% believe non-X, and the rest don’t have an opinion.” So?

Re-frame the picture (re-align the divide) and the fault-line becomes more troubling. Now the more telling chasm runs not between left-right content positions on questions “out there”; it runs rather within each of us as believers. The gap is between two very different attitudinal stances. One is the temptation to hold onto an ideological purity closed to any consideration that might undercut its passionately held answer;

the other calls for confrontation with the humbling possibility that my supposedly objective response is really masking self-interests I would rather not want held up to the light. The issue is that most demanding of imperatives, intellectual integrity. The courage to face our own comfort-seeking demons. The challenge to stand naked before the whole truth. It is too easy for us to use a religiously positive term like “incarnation-alist”—it’s so Christian!—and thereby place myself on the side of the angels. Much more difficult to be willing to be corrected by facts, especially when voiced by the mouths of people we might be inclined to treat as babies. More difficult for each of us, more difficult still for our church.



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A SURVIVOR, NOT A VICTIM

Sixteen years after a brutal rape in Central Park that nearly killed her and left her with severe brain injury Trish Meili addressed the annual convention of the American Psychological Association in August, 2005. Noting that she was working toward physical, emotional and spiritual wholeness, something doctors thought impossible, she said, “I felt like a survivor, rather than a victim,” and that this attitude helped her immensely. Four things helped her to keep from living in the past that could not be changed: 1. Psychotherapy and the support of others; 2. living in the present moment; 3. continuing to try to grow beyond what she once thought possible; 4. accepting herself as she is after the trauma. She was able to accept that the assault had happened, that it had permanently changed her life, but she would not let these facts control her. It is a testimony to her human spirit that she was able to run the New York Marathon six and one half years after the attack and that she was able to give this talk to a packed audience of psychologists. (Source: an article by Mellissa Dittmann Tracey in *Monitor on Psychology*, November, 2005, p. 40.)

Unhealthy Images of God:

WHEN TRUTH BECOMES A TOXIN IN THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Reverend Scott P. Detisch, Ph.D.

"Some falsehood mingles with all truth."

— Longfellow, *The Golden Legend*

When dealing with people's distorted notions of who God is and who God calls them to be, most pastoral ministers find that these distortions are based on some element of truth. Within every extreme claim about God or what God asks of us, there is some fragment of a rightful notion of God. This is nothing new; truth and distortion seem to be partnered in the broken human condition going all the way back to the Fall when the Tempter cleverly seduced Adam and Eve by twisting elements of truth to create enticing lies. For instance, it was true that if Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge their eyes would be opened and they would become like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5). What the Tempter does not tell our primeval parents is that their choice to eat the fruit will open their eyes to alienation and shame and that their knowledge would not come in the form of serene omniscience but in the painful recognition of what their sinful choice had done.

The primal distortion of truth into falsehood has been the legacy of the broken human condition through the ages. Sometimes we deceive others with our distortions of truth; and sometimes we deceive or mislead ourselves. This article will show how the latter is particularly evidenced in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especial-



“Confessors need to listen for what is behind penitents’ patterns of expression. These patterns will reveal dispositions that may harbor unhealthy and un-freeing images of God.”

ly with penitents who come to the celebration with unhealthy images of God.

DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

There is something genuinely divine and genuinely human in each sacramental encounter. What is divine is the total and gratuitous outpouring of all that God is for us in Christ: new life, empowerment, intimate presence, the capacity for servant-leadership, covenantal love, healing, and forgiveness. What is human is the readiness to receive from God the sacramental grace that makes our living more free and fulfilling and the world more noble. While the divine element is always complete, the human receptivity is always imperfect. Every believer is limited in his or her ability to open up to the full significance of the tremendous gift being received in a sacrament. There are times, however, when this human receptivity is so askew that the sacramental gift never becomes an effective experience. Such is the case with penitents who come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation with unhealthy notions of God that have become toxic.

These toxic notions can lie beneath the surface of what some confessors are trained or tempted to dismiss as simple faith or devout piety. Yet, to dismiss them this way is to fuel them and allow them to hold people’s inner spirit captive. Confessors need to begin to probe slowly and pastorally what lies within the disposition a penitent brings to the sacrament. They need to help penitents discern over time whether their manner of approaching the sacrament is truly helping to bring about what the sacrament is meant to do. It is not enough for the sacrament to help a penitent *feel* better or freer; the penitent must actually *become* more liberated and transformed.

In the one-to-one encounter in Rite I and Rite II of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessors need to

listen for what is behind penitents’ patterns of expression. These patterns will reveal dispositions that may harbor unhealthy and un-freeing images of God. For instance, some penitents may come to the sacrament in order to feel that they have been brought back into God’s good grace (a state of grace) and, thereby, have averted whatever punishment God may have meted out; that they have won back God’s love. Others may come to retrieve a sense of righteousness that comes from dutifully confessing their sins, receiving absolution, and doing their penance. This somehow returns their inner lives to a safe feeling of homeostasis, if only for a little while. Then there are those penitents who come because they discover, as all people must, that they cannot by themselves become free of sinful or destructive habits nor the shame and guilt that accompany them. Unable at the time to cooperate in the deeper, interior work to get to the source of these habits, “confession” becomes the easier choice because it offers a quick fix of feeling some relief, at least until the next occasion of sin.

In all of the dispositions described above there is an operative image of God that has become unhealthy and perhaps even toxic. It is important for confessors and all pastoral ministers who deal with people’s inner lives to identify what people’s operative images of God are and what influence these images unconsciously exert on them.

Our images of God lie deeply ingrained within us. They are often learned early in life and are shaped by our most vivid experiences of family, self-definition, and religious mentoring as well as by the rituals and stories that have appealed to our religious imagination. From this cluster of influences emerges a patterned sense of who God is. This becomes a believer’s operative image of God, i.e., one that often operates unexamined within that individual’s inner life.

This image of God is almost always linked to some truth about God that the believer was exposed to and particularly receptive to, e.g., God will judge the world in the end, God is perfect, God loves those who turn away from sin, God has a plan for us, etc. One’s operative image becomes toxic when this element of truth about God becomes distorted, misapplied, or isolated from the fuller portrait of God provided by scripture, Church teaching, mature and maturing theological insight, and a healthy and balanced reflection on life experiences. When a truth about God becomes a toxic image, that image can deeply poison a person’s inner

life and prevent the healing and liberation that God seeks to bring, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In addition, because there is an element of truth within the image, pastoral ministers and confessors are often very reluctant to challenge it. However, the image's toxicity increases when it goes unchallenged. Furthermore, its hold on a person's inner life grows when it goes unnoticed and appears to be nothing more than an expression of simple faith or devout piety. Let us now examine how some operative images of God, rooted in some element of truth, become toxic obstructions to the deep grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

TOXIC IMAGES OF GOD IN PENITENTS

It is important to note that not all penitents who exhibit rigidity or nervousness or who express helplessness in the face of sinful elements in their lives necessarily operate out of a toxic image of God. These characteristics can be attributed to other factors in a person's psyche or the circumstances in a person's life, even healthy ones. In discerning toxic images of God, the confessor or pastoral minister is looking for a firmly held religious notion that is obstructing God's reconciling grace from bringing joyful gratitude, a deep sense of being loved by God, openness to genuine transformation, the unfolding of that transformation, and a true sense of liberation within a person's spirit. Several images create such an obstruction.

God Who Punishes

Scripture is filled with stories and images of God punishing wrongdoers. While most of the portrayals of a vengeful God arise out of the Old Testament, even the New Testament offers portraits of divine punishment. For instance, in Matthew's gospel we hear Jesus speaking of eternal punishment for the "goats on the left" who fail to offer compassion toward the least ones (Matthew 25:41-46). In the Acts of the Apostles, Ananias and his wife Sapphira are struck dead for their deceit in withholding from the apostles a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their property (Acts 5:1-11). Thus, it would be very difficult for any religious imagination exposed to scripture to resist connecting God with punishment for wrongdoing.

THE TRUTH: God desires that all people choose what is good, noble, and just. This places them within the reign of God and furthers its growth on earth. To

The truth is that there are negative consequences for our sins and they are connected to God, but God is not the administrator of them. Instead, by our sinful choices we place ourselves at odds with the dynamics of the reign of God."

choose the opposite – to choose what is wrong, base, and unjust – is to move away from the reign of God. Since the ultimate harmony and intimacy of life are connected to God, then to make choices against what God is about moves one into experiences of disorder and alienation. These experiences may occur concretely in what unfolds in a person's life, or they may occur within a person as shame, guilt, unresolved anger, jealousy, crippling self-doubt, obtuseness, etc. These feelings may surface at a later time when an individual is more vulnerable to the forces of life. Hence, the truth is that there are negative consequences for our sins and they are connected to God, but God is not the administrator of them. Instead, by our sinful choices we place ourselves at odds with the dynamics of the reign of God.

THE TOXIN: When the negative consequences of our sinful choices are seen as God's vengeful response to what we have done, rather than as the natural result of our sinful responses to what God desires, then God is made into a deity whose wrath must be stilled and whose mercy must be won. God becomes the punishing menace who seeks out sinners to give them what they deserve for their wrongdoing. This is a very common toxic image of God with which confessors and other pastoral ministers have to contend. Such an image does not admit God's love and, therefore, does not open up to the transforming power of God's love within a person's spirit. The goal of "confession" for such a person is to keep a vengeful power at bay instead of to be drawn into the incredible embrace of a loving God. There is no healing that is truly transformative, and there is no advance in spiritual maturity because even goodness becomes a matter of immature self-focus ("God will reward me for the good thing I have done") and not a selfless offering to another.

“Simply put, God’s love is unearned, undeserved, and unconditional.”

Likewise, efforts at becoming a better person focus only on the surface of life (words, actions, thoughts) that would keep one in God’s good grace. Here we see a person responding out of a fear of a harsh God, which closes off the human spirit—the precise place where the true effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation take place. It is in the depths of the human spirit that the intimate experience of God’s love can captivate individuals in such a way that their hearts, minds, and wills are brought to a more self-emptying (and, therefore, a more Christian) level of motivation, insight, and desire. Only in the depths of the human spirit can love respond to Love.

God Who Expects Perfection

It is hard not to wince within ourselves when we hear Jesus say in the gospel, “Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Perfection is an ever-elusive goal, an unattainable ambition. Yet all Christian believers recognize that at the core of our religious principles is a call to become better persons—to be more than who we are right now.

THE TRUTH: The message and ministry of Christ never allow us to sink into complacency about how we are living our lives. There is always some further dimension of the gospel that we need to embrace and live out. Our lives are always in the process of becoming more and more like Christ. This is the process of perfection as holiness. Since it is a process, perfection is never an acquired state at any point in a person’s life. Furthermore, as a process it will go through periods of growth and regress since it is dependent on our flawed human dispositions. Human beings, while saved by Christ and constantly graced by God, remain flawed until the moment of eternal union with God. Yet God continues to embrace us throughout the process; otherwise the process of becoming holy could never continue since it is never solely the result of human effort.

It is always the graced means by which God draws us into the wholeness of life in the reign of God—a life of being undivided in our devotion to God and in our commitment to God’s people. This is what Jesus intends in his command to be perfect.

THE TOXIN: When Jesus’ command of perfection is translated by Christians into an admonition to be flawless and completely sinless, then another toxic image of God is created—God the Perfectionist. In this operative religious image, God is approachable in the Sacrament of Reconciliation only by way of perfect contrition for one’s sins, a precise and complete accounting of one’s life, and a firm resolve never to sin again. Many penitents with such an operative image of God give the impression that they are going to achieve some form of religious perfection by the sheer force of their human will and determination. Since, of course, this will never happen, one result is an increased rigidity in how they try to live their lives until they get it right and in going to confession and doing penance, which achieve at least a momentary feeling of perfection. Another result is an emotional or spiritual collapse because they cannot sustain the energy of a will determined to achieve perfection. Furthermore, seeing God as the Perfectionist never allows penitents to recognize how loved and loveable they are to God (and others) in their imperfection. This keeps a penitent’s spirit unfree and unable to explore the underlying factors of sin, since, to the penitent, examining imperfection has no point. Finally, such an image can result in a spiritual ennui because penitents do not allow themselves to experience God’s companionship in their imperfect state; for them connection with God is achieved only in the state of perfection. This makes God a deity who beckons us to something more (something unattainable without God) but who is not a help along the way – a rather cruel conception of God, if you think about it.

God Who Dispenses Love

To be loved by God is a cherished dimension of religious experience. “God is love,” St. John tells us, “and those who abide in love abide in God” (1 John 4:16). Somehow, therefore, our experience of God’s love is connected to how we love and how we choose to live our lives.

THE TRUTH: Simply put, God’s love is unearned, undeserved, and unconditional. This is the very nature of God’s grace, which is always a pure gift from the

heart of God. This does not mean that we human beings, who are the recipients of this gift, can choose to live our lives any way we want simply because the gift will always be offered. A loving gift *offered* still needs to be well *received*. Our own choices for love, our own desire to do what is right and good, and our own efforts to live the message of Christ open our spirits more fully and effectively to receive the love that God always offers.

THE TOXIN: When people equate the dynamics of God's love with how human love often operates (it is conditional and must be reciprocated in order to continue), then a toxic image of God develops—God whose love must be earned and can be lost. This image can often be very subtle since it appeals to the human sense of justice (as does the toxic notion of God's punishment), in that people should get what they deserve. Therefore, persons who sin and live selfish lives are not deserving of God's love. Penitents who operate out of this belief render the Sacrament of Reconciliation the means by which God's love is earned again. Like the penitents who see God as punishing wrongdoers, persons with this operative notion of God see themselves as repeatedly moving in and out of God's grace because they lose God's love when they sin, only to regain it by contrition, confession, absolution, and penance. The sacrament is easily reduced to a transaction in which they pay the price for their sins, earn God's love again, and begin to live in a state of grace for at least a little while—until their next sin. This mentality becomes increasingly toxic because it prevents penitents from asking the more difficult but healing questions about what lies behind their sinful patterns. There is little motivation for deep conversion and transformation because all that matters is regaining the state of grace they desire. These penitents do not experience themselves as always being held in God's love—the only true starting point for deep conversion and transformation.

God Who Controls Our Lives

As the Creator of the universe and each of our lives, God is the all-powerful One who has a providential plan for us. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always believed that the Creator is involved in the unfolding of that plan within human history and in the personal histories of each human being.

THE TRUTH: God does have a plan for all of us; it is the desire that all of creation be drawn into the reign of God. This is why Jesus Christ was sent into the

"The Spirit of God is always present and active in creation drawing every moment of human history and every human life into redemptive contact with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ."

world: "to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). Christ is the complete and definitive moment of God engaging in human history. Yet God does not manipulate events in order to accomplish God's plan. This would violate the very design of the One who endowed creation and human will with freedom. God, however, is not an idle spectator either. On the contrary, the Spirit of God is always present and active in creation drawing every moment of human history and every human life into redemptive contact with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Nevertheless, the efforts of the Spirit can always be resisted or rejected by free human beings.

THE TOXIN: When people interpret God's providence and involvement in human life as controlling the events of their personal histories, then they abdicate accountability for their own lives and make God a cunning manipulator who does things to them for their own good. Penitents with such a toxic image of God will say things like: "God must have a reason for this happening in my life;" "God must want me to feel this way for a reason;" "God must not think I am ready yet for things to change; there must be something I still have to learn." This kind of thinking can lead to the perpetuation of abusive relationships, self-destructive patterns, depression or misery, estranged relationships, and the lack of true insight into what leads a person into painful or sinful experiences. Furthermore, it is almost-always impossible to fall in love with a God who controls your life. Instead of love, what develops is an experience of spiritual slavery in which penitents seek to be more submissive to God's hidden plan and thereby become less responsible for their lives. The Sacrament of Reconciliation becomes the ritual expression of this submission. It also provides penitents with an opportunity to discover from the confes-

“All who pastorally minister to people need to examine their own operative notions of God and the manner in which they speak about God.”

sor more of what God’s plan is so that the penitents are in accord with it. But the penitents do not allow for interior reflection that could bring enlightenment about their union with Christ in the difficult and painful moments of their lives; there is no gaining of inner wisdom and strength that comes from the Spirit stirring within their life experiences; and, ultimately, there is no healing and freedom that the grace of the sacrament offers. Their lives become only a matter of changing what they are doing, feeling, or thinking in order to meet what they think God is demanding.

HEALING TOXIC IMAGES OF GOD

Although our images of God lie deeply ingrained within us, they are not beyond the reach of God’s healing grace offered in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, reshaping people’s images of God is not an easy or quick process. It will not happen in one sacramental encounter, one homily, a few adult education classes or faith-sharing sessions, nor one spiritual direction appointment. Slowly, over time, through all of the means just mentioned and more, people need to be coaxed into examining their concepts of God in light of the God revealed in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, his incredible stories of forgiveness, and his outpouring of love on the cross. Reshaping a person’s image of God is not the sole responsibility of confessors. Catechists, chaplains, pastoral ministers, and spiritual directors all need to participate and contribute to it. What are some things they can do? The following are some suggestions.

1. All who pastorally minister to people need to examine their own operative notions of God and the manner in which they speak about God. They need to discern if even inadvertently they contribute to mistaken notions of God by what they preach, teach, or share

from their own spiritual journey or theological convictions. Do they unintentionally reinforce any of the concepts of God mentioned above?

2. All who are in pastoral ministry need to imbue their faith communities with vivid “presentations” of God as Unconditional Love. These presentations can take many forms: the imagery used in prayers offered in liturgy and at parish meetings; spiritual reading made available to parishioners; personal testimonies of powerful experiences of God’s love, even in the midst of one’s sinfulness (this is especially important in the RCIA); frank discussions about how toxic images of God do not resonate with the God of Jesus Christ; and, finally, the promotion of genuine hospitality and authentic reconciliation within the faith community as a whole. Also, pastoral leaders need to be careful about whom they invite to offer parish missions or give parish retreats, especially when they include an evening for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sometimes these speakers, in their zeal to draw people to the sacrament, are not careful in examining the “fallout” of their presentations, which could actually fuel the toxicity of people’s approach to the sacrament.

3. At some point, people’s toxic images need to be exposed for what they are, but in a pastorally sensitive and effective manner, usually in a series of one-to-one encounters. Keep in mind, however, that people with such images of God will not be “converted” simply by rational, theological argument. Their images come from some deeply affective dimension of the inner life for which they will need help in peeling away the layers. Therefore, a faith community needs to promote and make available different opportunities for spiritual direction, both long and short term. In addition, there should be supportive referrals to counselors and therapists when the affective dimension of people’s toxic images is particularly powerful, severe, and unyielding.

4. While the affective dimension of the inner life needs to be attended to, so too does the rational dimension. For this reason, faith communities need to offer quality educational opportunities on important topics that connect with people’s operative images of God. These topics could include Jesus’ teachings and parables on forgiveness, the history and theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the writings of spiritual mystics who wrote of deep experiences of God’s love, and the psychology of faith formation and moral development. It would be important that discussion and not merely presentation happen during these educational opportunities.

5. Any transforming process needs communal support. This is why it is important for pastoral leaders to provide opportunities for faith-sharing groups. In faith sharing, individuals are exposed to others' images of God, which, in turn, can provide gentle but effective challenge and corrective to their own notions. However, for this to happen, the facilitators of the groups would have to have some training in group dynamics (otherwise the groups will fail) as well as in spotting toxic images of God and making referrals. Moreover, the leaders themselves ought to exhibit healthier, more theologically accurate ideas of who God is, what God calls us to, and how God can be approached in prayer and sacrament.

6. In the actual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessors and homilists (for communal celebrations) must make it clear that God's forgiveness is the *starting point* and not merely a result. They need to convey that God's forgiveness, since it is pure gift, is assured and already poured out to the penitents. It is from this assurance that the healing and transformation that penitents seek can begin to unfold since, no matter what needs to be explored in their lives, it will always be done in the context of God already and always loving the penitents. This is why the goal of the sacrament is not the forgiveness of God, which has already been offered, but the healing, conversion, and reconciliation that God's forgiveness can bring about in us.

7. We need to hold in the embrace of our prayers those who cannot experience being embraced by God's love because of their toxic notions of God and themselves. All pastoral ministers need to recognize that their own prayer lives might be the only conduit by which God's abundant mercy and compassion will reach those who are unable to open up effectively to such gifts in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or other ministerial means. If we truly believe in the efficacy of prayer, then this final recommendation needs to be both the first step and the final resort in all attempts to help heal people of their toxic images of God.

The inner life is a powerful arena of God's grace, where mercy, forgiveness, and love are lavishly given. But it can also be a cauldron of resistance to what God offers, especially in those who harbor toxic images of who God is and how God acts in their lives. St. Paul admonishes the faithful "not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1). Therein lies the task of all who minister to the inner life of others, especially within and around the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

"The goal of the sacrament is not the forgiveness of God, which has already been offered, but the healing, conversion, and reconciliation that God's forgiveness can bring about in us."

to help people receive well what God offers in grace. Often this ministry needs to assist individuals in discerning whether their own operative image of God is based on a theological truth that has become a toxin. By exposing the toxin and leading believers into a more balanced experience of the truth of who God is, confessors, spiritual directors, and other pastoral ministers can do much in readying a person for the healing and transformation that the grace of Reconciliation offers.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

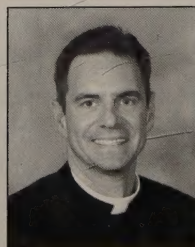
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Boundaries Revisted

Paul B. Macke, S.J.



In 1993 I wrote my first article for this journal on “Boundaries in Ministry.” It was an attempt to describe what boundaries are and how they are needed for the health of both the minister and the safety of those we serve.

In light of recent scandals in the Church, and the responses to that crisis, boundaries might seem like walls that can never be penetrated or a set of limits that always say “Do not cross!” While boundaries do set limits that must be maintained, they are not meant to block affective response. By affective, I mean that dimension of the human person that feels emotions and is able to connect to another in a real and intimate (though not sexual) way. Something essential is missing in ministry when we can no longer be warm with each other in appropriate ways and get close to both the people we serve and our peers. We can fail in ministry by misunderstanding what we are to do with our emotions during a conversation with those who have come to us seeking faith-filled ministry.

For example, John, a religious priest, has just begun intensive spiritual direction with Debbie, a married woman, who has chosen to make a thirty-day Ignatian retreat. After the first week, as Debbie is sharing the powerful impact that the experience of being loved by God is having on her entire being, John realizes that he finds Debbie a very attractive woman and is getting sexually aroused occasionally during his sessions. He does not act out his feelings, but he unwisely shuts them down and becomes cool toward Debbie. This coolness is communicated to her. She notices the change in John's verbal and non-verbal behavior. She follows the behavior he has modeled. She too backs off, shuts down her feelings. She begins to focus on herself, wondering what she might have done wrong to cause this coldness from her spiritual director. As far as John can tell, she stops being affective with God. Her conversation turns to more superficial aspects of prayer. For all practical purposes John's accompaniment of Debbie in her retreat has ceased. He no longer is "with" her affective experience of God.

John had a number of choices other than pulling back from being his naturally warm and responsive self, a move that triggered Debbie's awareness that something was wrong. As a spiritual director, once he realized that he was becoming sexually attracted to Debbie, John had several other options. One option he wisely did not choose was to act on those attractions, by fantasizing about those feelings, talking about his sexual attraction directly with Debbie, or giving her full hugs at the beginning and end of their sessions. These behaviors sexualize the relationship through inappropriate words or touch. This obviously would have been unethical in light of their professional relationship. It would have been a misuse of the power John holds as spiritual director. Fortunately John was aware that an imbalance of power always exists whenever someone seeks out a minister. The minister always holds the responsibility to exercise that power appropriately.

On the other hand, John could have terminated the relationship and referred Debbie to a new spiritual director. This might have been necessary if John found himself out of control and unable to remain centered during his sessions with Debbie. Such a termination might have been very negative for Debbie because she probably would have experienced this as a rejection and as her problem. However, termination and referral

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might have been appropriate if John was not free enough to accompany Debbie on her spiritual journey.

Finally, John could have honestly faced his sexual vitality, accepted his sexual feelings for Debbie, chose not to dwell or act on those feelings, and explored what this is revealing about himself and his own spiritual journey by talking with a trusted colleague and/or supervisor. This supervisory conversation could have helped him to deal directly with his attractions, which are an essential aspect of his humanity and of his ministry.

John probably needs to learn how to be both an effective minister who keeps boundaries and who simultaneously is an affective human being engaged in a ministerial relationship for the sake of the one who has come to him. What is involved here in both Debbie and John is affective. Debbie was experiencing affective, sexual energy in the experience of feeling loved by God. John was experiencing affective, sexual energy in the experience of receiving Debbie's report of her prayer of being loved.

The secular culture advocates acting out those sexual impulses, often as a promotion of "human honesty." Often Church culture advocates cutting off those sexual impulses as a promotion of "chaste behavior." In this instance and in many similar ministerial instances, neither of those responses is adequate. In fact, they usually block effective ministry. For example, John has to learn how to maintain boundaries and allow his affections to be present as he ministers to Debbie. He needs to model for Debbie, for others, and for himself that he will not break a boundary and that he is an affective and caring human being whose emotions are present in the ministerial relationship.

When John can do that, Debbie will experience two realities: one, John is safe and will not move to meet his own needs through inappropriate action

toward her; two, he is affectively present to her, and she can continue to communicate her reality to this minister as she welcomes God's grace into her being.

CONCLUSION

Obviously I recommend the last option if at all possible in order to keep the spiritual direction relationship positive, according to the goals of the retreat, and ethically appropriate, given the imbalance of power and non-mutual self-disclosure. I believe these two things are necessary in a spiritual direction relationship.

Supervision of spiritual direction is a very important element to help directors uncover personal issues that can cloud their companionship in the Spirit with directees. The more frequent the sessions, especially in longer or directed retreats, the more it is necessary for spiritual directors to receive adequate supervision.

The Church is crying out for ministers who have appropriate professional boundaries and ability to connect with people in affective ways. How often have we experienced priests and other ministers in our Church who seem to say all the right things and work hard, yet we cannot connect with them? They lack consistent warmth, compassion, and a sense of being real. Homilies or talks from these people betray a shallowness primarily built on a "mask," or what psychologists label a false self. This false self gets defined by the role of priest, religious, spouse, spiritual director, pastor, chaplain, boss or something else. Real ministers of the Gospel are men and women who have struggled, sometimes with great personal suffering, to find their true selves and then to live with integrity in relationship to others, their work, and their God. The humanity of

Jesus Christ is real for these ministers, and their lives reflect a strong desire to be close to others in the Body of Christ.

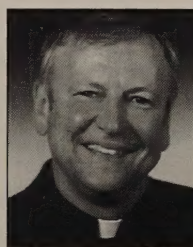
Real people in ministry do live with appropriate boundaries that enable them to relate with genuine warmth to others. These ministers are both "effective" and "affective." It is very important that we integrate appropriate affectivity and boundaries in ministry, not only for our own sake and the sake of those we serve but for the health of the whole church.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Malone, M.D., T.P. and P. T. Malone, M.D. *The Art of Intimacy*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987.

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Keenan, S.J., J. F. and J. Kotva, Jr. editors. *Practical What You Preach*. Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 1999.



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